



Valentino

BY ALAN ARNOLD

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RUDOLPH VALENTINO—the name still has its magic. But here is an explosive book which will instantly and rightly demolish the Valentino myth, and it makes engrossing reading as well. With the impact of his new and unique material, the author gives us a book about Hollywood and a Hollywood star in which facts—fascinating facts—are used in place of fiction. This, Valentino's true life story, reveals for the first time what legend has obscured for decades. It tells not only of the fabulous Valentino, greatest of all matinee idols who still stands for the ideal of masculine sex-appeal, but of the simple Italian boy as well, Rodolpho Guglielmi, who came to America to seek his fortune ; of his early struggles, his films, the sudden success which threatened to overwhelm him, and, movingly, of his devoted love for one woman only—his wife, the dynamic Natacha Rambova—a story considerably more romantic than any of those invented and imagined about him. Rudolph Valentino's life is a success story in the true American tradition, repeated countless times in less well-known cases. A poor immigrant boy arrives in the United States. He struggles to make his way among strangers whose language and customs he finds foreign and confusing. But with talent and perseverance he justifiably achieves fame. This is a drama enacted a thousand times a day, but still a miracle of the American way. This book, which has a Foreword by Hollywood analyst John Paddy Carstairs, captures the glitter of Hollywood in the silent days, and, more elusive, the twofold personality of Valentino himself—the Great Lover of the screen and the man behind the mask. Hero of a million dreams, he supplied romance to the romanceless of many continents through infinitely varied, vicarious dramas.

(see back flap)





VALENTINO



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Rudolph Valentino in *The Sheik*
—the film which marked the beginning of the
startling years of fame

Valentino

By

ALAN ARNOLD

Foreword by

JOHN PADDY CARSTAIRS

With 33 Illustrations

LIBRARY PUBLISHERS
New York

*First Published 1954 by Library Publishers
8, West 40th Street, New York 18, N.Y.
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*Printed in Great Britain for Library Publishers by
William Brendon & Son, Ltd.
The Mayflower Press (late of Plymouth)
at Bushey Mill Lane
Watford, Herts.*

To
LESLIE FLINT
*President of the Valentino Memorial Guild
of Great Britain*

And each who sat and watched alone
Could secretly believe and feel
He was a lover—and her own.

The Author wishes to acknowledge the debt
he owes to Donald Angus, without whom the
book could not have been written.

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FOREWORD

HERE is a book-bomb which, when read, will instantly and rightly explode the Valentino myth! It makes, I am sure you will agree, most interesting reading.

My claim to qualification for this foreword is that I am a writer-film director with Anglo-American experience who has—and here I regret that *Anno Domini* takes screen credit alongside of me—been in the celestial cinematic city in the silent days *and* those of the talkies. I have worked in humble movie jobs in some of the studios mentioned in this book and I have been friendly with quite a few of the famous names herein.

I have been actor, technician, scenarist and novelist in Hollywood, and I have been a friend of that fantastic, big-hearted star of silent days, Norman Kerry, who, as you will read, was one of Valentino's staunchest friends.

In short, I have seen hard times and good times in Hollywood and, perhaps because of them, can assess the good job the author has done in his presentation of a factual biography of a fabulous character.

Because I have earned my living in a profession in which I am proud to serve and because so much hyperbole is spewed up about it, it is a pleasant and a healthy change to find a book about Hollywood and a Hollywood star in which facts are used in place of fiction, this without detracting from the new and unique material the author has given us.

Here is a biography which, at last, places the Valentino story into its correct perspective. For, as the years go by, the glamour legend grows until now the romantic actor has become a demigod. In this, his true picture of the celebrated international silent picture star, the writer has set out not to debunk Valentino, but to debunk the brouhaha that abounds whenever the name Rudolph Valentino is mentioned.

(And, incidentally, what a wealth of fascinating information he has amassed! How many of us, for instance, knew that in

World War One Valentino tried to enlist as a pilot in our Royal Flying Corps; or that, after his death, loving admirers equipped a London hospital ward and dedicated it to his memory? Happily, this true story abounds in facts, and bases its undeniable conclusions upon them.)

In these days of celluloidal enlightenment, there is a good deal of controversy about the star system. A number of people deplore it, a number feel that more importance or credit should be given to script and director. I do not (at any rate, not here) wish to enter into this provocative argument; all I do want to say is that people *pay* to see, *want* to see, *demand* Personalities. That was the reason for the Valentino success—he had Personality. Other words coined by zealous press agents—shining, new, dazzling words like ‘It’, ‘Sex Appeal’, ‘Zing’, ‘Oomph’—are nothing more than our old friend Personality! Valentino had it—plus!

As the author says in this story, Valentino’s vast public confused his screen personality with his own, enveloping him with an aura he did not naturally possess; his screen characterizations were accepted as an accurate reflection of his own character. In this, the facts prove, the public was very, very wrong.

This story is not merely a portrait of the fabulous Valentino; it is a clear, human account of the life of one Rodolpho Guglielmi who was, so to speak, the man behind the mask, the camouflage, the surface glitter of the adored Valentino. And how that mask really glittered—it shone with a wonder that has never been equalled.

Valentino had something that I fancy will never be captured in quite the same way on the screen any more—tremendous magnetism made more powerful by SILENCE. That the intimacy of talk had not happened in the cinema is an important fact to remember in any assessment of Valentino, for, no matter how brilliant a screen love scene may be, the *imagination* of what is being said is inevitably much better. Valentino was fortunate in that he had our imaginations working for him.

We gave to our silent screen heroes or heroines the voices of our dreams. But, of course, without Valentino’s personal magnetism that would not have been enough.

And so—against a backdrop of Hollywood at its most amazing

—the struggling, hard-working, hard-living, Hollywood of the gaudy nineteen-twenties—there emerged a celluloid lover possessed of a quality; such stuff as dreams are made on. This is his story.

JOHN PADDY CARSTAIRS

PART I
TO THE STARS

Chapter One

RODOLPHO Alfonzo Raffaello Pierre Filibert Guglielmi di Valentina d'Antonguolla was born at three o'clock in the morning on 6th May, 1895, in the little village of Castellaneta in southern Italy.

His parents were a happy couple. His father, Giovanni Guglielmi, a former officer in the Italian cavalry, was at this time a small farmer and veterinary doctor for the district. He made a comfortable living and his family wanted for none of the necessities of life and were well supplied with the modest luxuries of it.

His mother, the daughter of Pierre Filibert Barbin, a distinguished Parisian doctor, was a more than normally happy woman. During her childhood she had endured the seige of Paris, and the horrors and privations she had experienced then had made her all the more appreciative of the simple joys and pleasures of life that people so often take for granted. She took a great delight in caring for her four children and in running the low-built Italian farm-house with its thick, whitewashed walls and spacious rooms. In every room there were crucifixes and Madonnas as evidence of her piety, for which she was much respected in the district.

Rodolpho began life with no particular advantages save those of a happy home and loving parents. He had a childhood very similar to that of any boy born into an Italian farming family. He played in the sunshine with his brother, Alberto, and his sisters, Beatrice and Maria, and ate prodigiously of good, simple fare. He engaged in boyhood pranks just as any boy would and was punished for them.

What the children enjoyed most, however, was to sit cross-legged at the feet of their mother while she told them stories. It was a charming scene: the attractive little Frenchwoman sitting against the wall of the farm-house in the sunshine doing her needlework, a craft in which she was particularly skilled, with her four children, brown skinned and dark eyed, looking up at her, en-

thrilled by the tales she told them of the great ladies and noble knights who had coloured the history of Italy and France.

Even the Italian ancestors of her own children had played a part in a very stormy period of Italian history. Some of the names her children had inherited originated with the noble deeds of these ancestors in an era of feuds and duels and ceaseless turmoil. The d'Antonguolla, which the little Rodolpho bore, indicated a right to some royal property and the di Valentina was a papal title.

In a magnificent and violent age long past the Guglielmis had been a powerful and aristocratic family and these names had been their pride. Then there had been a quarrel with the immensely influential Colonna family in which a Guglielmi had killed a Colonna. The Colonnas had risen in force and had driven the Guglielmis from their lands so that the family had been reduced to poverty.

With magnificent courage they had settled in the village of Martina Franca in the province of Lecce, had bent their backs to the tilling of the soil, and over the years they gradually re-established themselves, though never to the glory that had once been theirs.

Then, in the year 1850, when Ferdinand II reigned over Sicily and Naples, a band of brigands took Martina Franca, driving out the inhabitants. Once more the Guglielmis lost all they possessed and had to start again, this time in the village of Castellaneta, near to the port of Taranto.

The Guglielmi children were enraptured by their mother's recounting of these dramatic stories of the daring and courage, the gains and misfortunes, of their forbears. They began to connect themselves with the colourful figures of bygone days and played the history of their family among the flowers and fruit trees and outbuildings of their father's farm.

Alberto and Rodolpho became a Colonna and a d'Antonguolla and their sticks became rapiers flashing in the sunshine in defence of a family's honour. Their sisters stood nearby, great ladies waiting to bestow favours upon the victor.

Little Beatrice died at an early age and for a time there was sadness, but the memories of children are short and a new playmate came upon the scene. Her name was Teodolinda, and she looked

as romantic as her name sounded. Nine years old, Teodolinda was nearly three years older than Rodolpho, but it was he who took her as 'his lady'. He adored her ivory skin and delicate features, her raven hair hanging loose about her shoulders and the flash in her black eyes. Although he was merely six, Rodolpho could not wait to declare his love for Teodolinda. He made known his feelings and received a sound thrashing for his impudence—from the little girl's elder sister!

As the boys grew older Alberto lost interest in these childish games and Rodolpho was left alone. Now there was no wicked count or proud baron to duel with, and he became quiet and dreamy and spent hours lying in the hot sun with his eyes closed, his thoughts far away in a world of romance where he ventured after gold or rescued fair maidens in distress or captured castles from the Colonnas or the Borgias. To all outward appearances he was a well-behaved, healthy and normal little boy, but behind those brown eyes he was the hero of a thousand battles, a fearless knight who had won the heart of many a fair lady.

When Rodolpho was eleven his father died, that stern yet kindly man who had always been there to say what was right and what was wrong, to tell the children what they could or could not do. Before he passed away he called his two sons to his bedside and with a crucifix in his hand gave them the maxim by which they must live. In the firm, commanding tones of an officer of the cavalry he told his sons: "Love your mother and, above all, your country"—and with tears streaming down their cheeks the boys swore on the crucifix their oath to "Mother and Italy".

It was a scene which lingered long in Rodolpho's mind. He never forgot how silent his mother had been as she stood there by their side, the rosary in her hands, her eyes raised to Heaven in prayer. In this solemn moment, young as he was, he fully realized what his parents had meant to each other. For the rest of the time he remained at home before going away to school he lavished affection upon his mother; he wanted to do everything he could to take his father's place, to make her burden lighter. From that day forward, love to him meant the wonderful relationship that had existed between his parents.

Rodolpho's uncle stepped in to manage the affairs of the

family, and it was decided that the boys must be sent away to school.

Rodolpho did not relish the prospect; his home life had been happy, leisurely and marked by simple delights which he would miss as sorely as he would miss his mother, whom he adored, as well as the kinship of his brother and sister. He would miss his ramblings among the vine-covered slopes beyond the village and he would miss the occasional family outings to the coast and the great port of Taranto. He would miss the lazy days spent swimming and diving agilely and further scorching his already bronzed body. More than anything he would miss the privacy and tenderness of home. School no doubt was a blustering place, unlike home where, during the evenings of the brief winter, he would sit beside his mother in front of the fire and dream of a vague though wonderful future wherein he would be rich and immensely admired.

But school could not be postponed and Rodolpho went to the Dante Alighieri College, the Italian equivalent of a grammar school, where he remained until he was thirteen. From there he went to a military academy, where his daydreams and love of romance got him into endless trouble. He neglected his studies, and instead of grappling with subjects that were part of his education, allowed his mind to wander into realms of fantasy, and he was constantly being punished.

On the day King Vittorio Emmanuele visited the town Rodolpho was confined to the dormitory, stripped to his vest to make sure that he would remain there, while the rest of the school went to see the King pass by.

It was a heart-rending situation for a boy who loved colourful ceremonies. All the pomp and splendour of a royal visit within a short distance, yet he could not step outside the door! No mere vision of an imaginary nobleman, but a real king with all the trappings and splendour of rank. It might never happen again.

With grim determination Rodolpho prowled around the school in his vest searching for something to wear. He found a uniform, several sizes too large but more than enough to cover his nakedness, a helmet and a sword. This fine apparel called also for a horse; then he could ride to the street through which the King would pass.

He made his way to the stables in the hope of finding one, but his luck was out this time; only a donkey stood in the stalls. Undaunted, he mounted the donkey and went off to see the King.

On reaching the royal route he found a much better viewpoint than the boys from the school and this compensated for the jeers that greeted his strange attire and not so noble steed. But the consequence of this escapade was expulsion. Rodolpho was sent home in disgrace to his family.

Soon afterwards he was dispatched to another military academy, the Collegio della Sapienza in Perugia. But he was no more serious in his studies. Still he dreamed and read stories of deeds of valour, and consequently failed to learn the rudiments of arithmetic and algebra. He enjoyed history, however, and learned some Spanish and French. He was also an enthusiastic football player and this won him considerable popularity among his friends, though not with the masters.

In the evenings the boys used to gather in their common room to sing or play on musical instruments. Those not so employed would practice dance steps, which provided amusement but in no way developed their grace as they all wore enormous hob-nail boots!

Rodolpho remained at the Collegio della Sapienza until he was fifteen and left with high hopes of entering the cavalry.

In Italy the position of cavalry officer was a very fine one and the sons of the noblest families were drawn to it. The uniform was striking and the long blue cape that went with it gave a glorious dash to the general effect. To be able to wear such colourful apparel was one of young Rodolpho's most cherished dreams. Thus it was a terrible blow when his uncle explained that the family could not afford to support him in this ambition. The pay of a cavalry officer was small, the expenses large. Rodolpho must consider something else.

After much inquiry and consultation he and his family agreed that he should enter the Royal Naval Academy to prepare for a naval career. Determined that he should not again be frustrated, he settled down to work hard in preparation for the entrance examinations in Venice. He studied earnestly and departed for Venice proud and confident. He returned dejected

and humiliated. His chest expansion was an inch less than the minimum accepted.

Rodolpho was almost too ashamed to tell his mother of this failure but at last he blurted it out. He was taken by surprise when she received the news with a cry of delight. She told him that she had never wanted him to be a cavalry officer, neither had she liked the idea of his becoming a naval officer. She reminded him of the oath he had sworn to his dying father, that oath to "Mother and Italy". Why could he not take some safe work so that she need never worry about him? Why not become a farmer? Farmers were as much needed in Italy as were soldiers and sailors. By hard work and study of modern, scientific methods he might win for himself more land, just as his ancestors had done, and might even raise the family to its former glory among the great landowners of Italy.

Two of his most cherished ambitions destroyed, here was another to goad him forward, to inspire him. He set off from home once more, this time to the Royal Academy of Agriculture.

Now he settled down to his studies as never before, determined to be successful in this new plan for his future. Because his illusions had been so rudely shattered twice he began to dream less; he set about improving his physical condition by careful exercising and developed a fine physique; and he thought no more of the gracious ladies of days long past and began to admire those that were about him.

On each successive holiday home he found new sweethearts and during school terms corresponded with them, extracting from books of verse florid phrases for their flattery. He compared them to dancing flowers, their beauty to the flaming sunset or a little cloud kissed silver by the moon. But, though behaving in a perfectly normal manner during this period of calf love, he was also beginning to develop the mind of a man of the world, never doubting that these sweethearts of his in Castellaneta received other letters just as full of adoration as those he laboriously penned.

He remained at the Royal Academy of Agriculture for two years and this time returned home something of a hero—he had graduated with honours.

His family, relieved that he had at last made a success of something, were anxious to encourage in him the idea that hard

work brought rich rewards. They suggested he should take a holiday. Where would he like to go? And to the romantically minded Rodolpho there was only one place in the world for a holiday—Paris, the gayest city of Europe and the one about which his mother had told him so much.

At first the family was uncertain, feeling that Rodolpho was too young to be allowed alone in France, yet he had done so well that they were anxious to treat him with generosity.

To Paris he went, in his pocket a rather liberal sum of money provided by his family, a reward for the fine work he had done, and as the train carried him north through the dusty hill country of Italy and on through the lush green of central France, Rodolpho felt very much the mature man setting out on the first real masculine adventure of his life.

It proved an adventure indeed. Paris is kind to bright-eyed, sleek young men and she caught him up in the whirl of her gaiety, swept him along in the high pitch of her carefree life. There was a smile for him on every boulevard, a feast in every café. There was the excitement of theatres and the pleasure of rich wines, and all the time there was music in his ears and bright lights in his eyes making him deaf to caution and blind to facts. So that one morning he awoke to find himself suddenly alone in the gay city without a franc in his pocket. He had not even enough to pay his train fare home. The bold adventurer was laid low.

Now friendless in a strange city he could think of nothing else to do but write home asking for more money. Alas for his vanity, there was no alternative.

Almost by return he received a sum sufficient to enable him to travel home in some comfort. But, on taking what should have been a last look at Paris, he decided that he just could not tear himself away, not when he had begun to *live* for the first time in his life. Instead of buying a ticket to Castellaneta he travelled at the cheapest rate to Monte Carlo where he hoped to be able to win sufficient at the tables to return again to Paris.

Unfortunately, chance was not on his side and with every turn of the roulette wheel he found himself with less in his pockets. No longer could he delay; he must turn his back on the pleasures of life and face up to its realities—Castellaneta and the displeasure of his family.

He reached home penniless but with the conviction that, having won honours in scientific farming, a glowing future was in store for him. He was astonished to find that his family did not share this view. In the eyes of his uncle in particular his previous hard work was offset by his subsequent escapades—squandering money in Paris, gambling at Monte Carlo. Such recklessness, his uncle declared, was dangerous. It might bring some terrible disgrace to the family name.

Again the family consulted. What was to be done with the Guglielmi black sheep. There was certainly no place for him in Castellaneta where the name of Guglielmi must never be anything but highly respected. The farther he went away the better. There was America, for example; the land of opportunity—and it was thousands of miles away. If Rodolpho got into trouble there, as they fully expected he would, there was not the same chance of the scandal reaching the ears of people in Castellaneta. Rodolpho's mother protested, but her protests were overruled by the vote of the rest of the family. Rodolpho would be given all the family could spare and packed off to America. After that it was up to him to make good.

Rodolpho felt no grief at this decision of despairing relations. He had already found romance and adventure beyond the bounds of his native land. New York might be even more exciting than Paris.

Yet, during preparations for the trip, he was saddened to see his mother cry sometimes and though he tried to comfort her it was she who comforted him. She was sure that he would succeed. He must work hard, write home regularly—and, above all, be careful with his money.

And Rodolpho sailed for America on the liner *Cleveland* on 9th December, 1913. He arrived in New York on 23rd December.

Chapter Two

STANDING on the deck of the *Cleveland* as it sailed into New York harbour, Rodolpho gazed up at the skyline enraptured. The tall skyscrapers rising to the heavens, encircled by a thin early morning mist, appeared to him like silver towers floating on clouds. It seemed to him in that moment that here were the castles of his dreams. Here was the land where all the imaginary adventures of his boyhood would become fact.

He was eighteen and full of confidence in the future, for in a New York bank lay the dollar equivalent of eight hundred pounds which his family had scraped together to give him a start in his new life—an inexhaustible sum. Moreover, he had in his pocket a letter of introduction from his brother to the Commissioner of Immigration in New York and that, he felt, absolutely guaranteed a good post.

Once again he was quick to meet with disillusionment. Almost from the moment the liner docked there were difficulties. First he found that he had not been careful enough with his cash in hand which the family had given him as expenses on the trip, and he was told that he could not take his luggage ashore until he had settled his account with the purser. This meant that he had to go immediately to his bank in Wall Street and collect some money, simple enough for someone who spoke English, but Rodolpho spoke not one word.

Having, after much difficulty, found the bank, he got completely lost when returning to the boat. It was pouring with rain and he was drenched through, and every time he asked for directions he misunderstood and went miles out of his way. In the end he was saved by a man who spoke some Italian and eventually got to the ship at eight in the evening.

The problem of where to live had been solved by an Italian he had met on the boat. This man had given him the address of an Italian family named Giolotti who let rooms. Rodolpho went directly to the Giolotti residence and arranged to rent a suite of

rooms, for nothing less than a suite would do for someone with £800 to his credit in the bank. The young immigrant settled comfortably in the front of the house in a suite comprising a bedroom, a bathroom and a sitting-room. In his own mind he was justified in this arrangement, for he would have no work to go out to for some time, he told himself, for first he must learn to speak English. While learning it was important to be comfortable in agreeable living quarters.

The next day he set out to explore the city, but before many hours had passed he began to feel very disheartened. It was no fun wandering about a strange city, however exciting, knowing no one and with no friends to meet in the evening. He was jostled this way and that in streets crowded by people engaged in last-minute Christmas shopping, and the gaudily dressed and brilliantly lit shops and excited faces all about him accentuated his loneliness. He returned to his rooms at night feeling homesick. Being a gay adventurer in Paris was very different from being a stranger in New York, speaking no word of English and faced with the task of building a life there.

Christmas Day was even worse. The shops were closed and the streets were empty, and as he wandered along the cold wet pavements he could hear the sounds of merrymaking coming from behind lighted windows. He thought of the little farm-house in Castellaneta and his mother and Maria and the old friends who would be calling. He thought of the laughter and the singing and the toasts that would be drunk. It was all so far away and he was so lonely, so helpless here in this great city. As he sat eating a solitary Christmas dinner in a little restaurant in a side-street he found difficulty in swallowing the food and his eyes were filled with tears. He returned to his rooms and cried himself to sleep.

He spent his days walking the streets and in the evenings he wrote long letters home to his mother telling her of all that he was seeing in New York. He described the tall buildings, the bustle of the streets and the peculiar habits of the people, such as gum chewing, which was a constant source of amusement to him and was then unknown in Italy. He did not tell his mother his true feelings, the despair he already felt. He had failed so many times, and she had expressed such confidence in him. He just had to meet with success now. And so his letters home were gay

and told of the wonderful prospects that lay ahead in this land of opportunity, yet even as he wrote his early confidence seemed to have ebbed away.

On New Year's Eve Rodolpho ventured out into the streets again in an attempt to capture some of the gaiety of the crowds. But it was no use. He was swept along as before in the surging mass, surrounded by strange faces, deafened by the noise, and quite unable to exchange a greeting or share a joke with anyone in the excited, celebrating crowds. He cursed the Collegia della Sapienze for not having taught him English. Of what use were French, Spanish and Italian in this alien land?

A few days later he dined at Bustanoby's Restaurant, a fairly expensive establishment where the waiters spoke French, and being able to exchange a few words with them consoled him a little. He became a frequent visitor. But waiters are busy people with little time to stand and chat, so that after a time even this palled and Rodolpho sat at his table unable to hide his desperate unhappiness.

On a subsequent evening he noticed, two tables away, three young men in a mood of obvious gaiety. They looked very continental and he began to stare at them and tried to overhear what they were saying. One of the three noticed Rodolpho's interest in his party and, realizing from the young man's sad and dejected appearance that he was unhappy and alone, walked up to Rodolpho's table and introduced himself as Count Alex Salm of Austria. He asked him if he would care to join them and Rodolpho jumped at the offer. And so he made his first friends in New York: Count Alex Salm; his brother, Count Otto; and George Ragni.

They were not the best of friends for a youth who still had his way to make in the world, for they were all fairly affluent and lived gay lives. But rather than endure loneliness again Rodolpho went out with them regularly, spending far more than he should. Apart from the money he squandered, he ceased to learn English, for his new friends spoke French all the time. He tried to remedy this by moving from the Giolottis, where he could speak in Italian, to a boarding house where only English was spoken. Although running around with these young men-about-town was not the sensible thing to do, it was to prove of value to him in the future, paradoxically because they went dancing every night.

Rodolpho had never had any proper dancing lessons and apart from the fun with his friends at school he had never attempted to learn a step. But now he set out seriously to master the art, for he disliked being left alone while his gay friends whirled around the dance floor. He did not find dancing difficult to learn because he had a natural grace which carried him through. Before very long he had learned every step except the *cortez*, the basic step of the tango, and Count Alex Salm coached him in this most difficult dance until Rodolpho could do it perfectly.

The months of wining and dining and dancing went by and Rodolpho continued to spend lavishly. When he realized that this sort of life could not go on for ever, it was already too late. He had danced and wine and dined his way through the £800. He was all but penniless and with no immediate prospects.

Without further delay he made use of his letter of introduction to the Commissioner of Immigration. An interview with that official was arranged, and Rodolpho took along the one document he possessed which proved that he was capable of doing something well—his diploma from the Italian Agricultural Academy.

Chapter Three

A MR. CORNELIUS BLISS, a millionaire who had recently built himself a palatial country residence on Long Island, wanted the grounds of his establishment laid out in the style of an Italian landscape. He needed an expert to supervise the project and accordingly applied to the New York labour bureau. The applicant they sent was not exactly an expert, but he impressed Mr. Bliss with his appearance and manner—Rodolpho got the post.

The position carried a very reasonable salary and a flat of his own above newly built garages near the house. Everything pointed to his making a success of the job and he settled in with enthusiasm.

His period of being a man-about-New York had given him a more serious manner and a veneer of maturity, but, at heart, he was still very much a boy. He began to play around on the millionaire's estate. At first he contented himself with a pony, but then a workman's motor cycle caught his eye. One day when no one was about he went for a ride on it, though he had never driven any vehicle before.

All might have gone well had he not caught the attention of a group of girls. He began to show off. Lying flat on the cycle he went at full speed down a steep hill, lost control before reaching the bottom, and ran into a telegraph pole. Miraculously, he escaped serious injury, but the motor cycle was very badly damaged.

He was so ashamed of himself and so sincerely upset when apologizing to the owner of the motor cycle that he was forgiven, though he had to pay the full cost of repairing it. But the news reached Mr. Bliss who did not treat the matter lightly. He dismissed Rodolpho, making the excuse that his wife had now decided on a golf course instead of an Italian landscape garden and that, therefore, the services of a landscape gardener were no longer required.

Rodolpho was genuinely upset to have lost his first job in America so soon, but he was rather pleased to have the opportunity of returning to New York. Immediately upon arrival he celebrated, with the result that he awoke next morning to find that he had dissipated all that he had earned during his month with Mr. Bliss. There was nothing to be done but to go back to the Commissioner of Immigration.

This time he was not so fortunate. He was again sent into the country, to the estate of a millionaire in New Jersey. But there was no time here to run around on ponies or get into mischief with a motor cycle. He was awakened at seven in the morning, given a pair of overalls and told to get busy picking insects off rose leaves. This was work he did not like and he was being paid only three pounds a month and his keep. After two weeks of it he felt he could stand it no longer and went to his employer to ask for a better position. The employer declined this request, gave Rodolpho two weeks' pay and bade him good-bye.

Such brusque treatment greatly offended the young Italian. He caught the next train to New York, leaving instructions that all his things were to be sent after him. But a message followed close behind to the effect that he must himself attend to the removal of his luggage, and this cost him his last cent. To add further to his humiliation and annoyance, Rodolpho found that his linen had been sent to a Chinese laundry which had ruined his fine Italian handkerchiefs by stamping them with enormous Chinese characters.

The discomfort of an empty stomach soon pushed out all these minor irritations, and he was at his wits end to know what next to do. He could not very well go back to the Commissioner of Immigration a third time; that patient and kindly official had already done what he could. Swallowing his pride, he went to see Mr. Cornelius Bliss again and asked the millionaire to give him back his job. He admitted that he had been an irresponsible fool and swore that in future he would behave and devote all his energy to his work. Mr. Bliss, though greatly appreciating this sensible approach, told Rodolpho that he no longer had any post to offer him. Nevertheless, he was able to help him. He arranged for Rodolpho to work for the New York Park Commission as an apprentice landscape gardener. As that situation



Rodolpho *left* was a seventeen-year-old cadet at an agricultural college when this picture was taken



Moran of the Lady Letty—one of the early films; Dorothy Dalton co-starring

did not carry a wage sufficient to live on, Mr. Bliss also made him an allowance.

Overwhelmed by such generous treatment from an employer he had let down, he determined to work hard and conscientiously. Even though his first task turned out to be picking insects off rose leaves in New York's Central Park he did not complain. He felt that this was his last chance. He also saw that the job might later lead to a good position with the New York municipal authority.

He worked and studied hard for a month and then he went to the City Hall to take an examination necessary to progress with the Park Commission. There he met with a technicality that made him feel that fate, his fellow men and the whole world conspired against him. Only American citizens, it seemed, were employed by the City and Rodolpho was not an American citizen. He asked anxiously how long it would take to become one. The answer came—five years.

Sick in heart and depressed as never before Rodolpho went back to see Mr. Bliss yet again.

The millionaire was very sympathetic and offered further to help him financially until something turned up. But Rodolpho politely declined this offer. He wanted a job, not money. His pride had been in the dust too long. This time he made up his mind to help himself or perish. He had only himself to blame, for his present state of penury and could not go on accepting money he did not earn. He thanked Mr. Bliss for this kindness, bade him farewell and walked out into the world, penniless and without prospects once more.

His only assets now were his clothes. Some of these he pawned and then took a room at two dollars a week, little more than a broom closet at the top of a dingy rooming house on the outskirts of the city. There was a metal sink in it where he washed and shaved in cold water, drying himself on newspapers because he had sold his fine linen towels. Some days he sold something—a cigarette case, cuff-links and so on—to pay for a meagre meal. Other days he earned about fifty cents sweeping out a bar-room or polishing brass.

But even this mean standard of living did not last long. He fell behind with his rent and was refused admission to his room.

On this particular day he had walked five miles to the City Hall and five miles back and his feet burned with pain. He pleaded with his landlady to be allowed to change his shoes but even this request was refused. He was told that until he paid what he owed all his things would be held.

That night he got a bed in one of the meanest lodging houses in the city, where tramps and beggars stayed. Even so, it took his last cent. The next day he went hungry and at night made himself as comfortable as possible on a bench in Central Park—quite close to the spot where he had picked insects off the roses.

Things did not improve quickly. Some days he earned enough to buy himself a meal. Other days he sneaked into New York bars which gave free snacks to drinkers at their busiest times, grabbing a lunch without it being noticed that he had not bought a beer. When even that was not possible he drank water from a public fountain and went hungry.

He was now reduced to the one suit he stood in and this was becoming worn. At this juncture he felt forced to call on his friends, the Salms, to ask for help. They supplied him with a change of clothing and gave him what money they could spare, which was very little. War had begun in Europe and had cut off the Salms' sources of income. These one-time frivolous men about town were living near to destitution point.

To add to his worries Rodolpho received a letter from his mother telling him that the war had affected his family badly, for although Italy had not yet entered the war the threat of it had caused a general depression. The family fortunes had slumped and they were living meagrely. Though his mother did not exactly ask for help she implied that as her son was apparently making his way in New York anything he had left over would bring relief to his hard-pressed family.

This news was harder to bear than his own miserable plight. He thought of the hard-earned money his family had given him to set him off on the road to success. He remembered bitterly how he had squandered those funds, dancing and drinking with frivolous people. Now his family were near to starvation. At such long distance their plight became exaggerated in his mind, and several times he thought of wild schemes to get money to send home. He would have turned to crime had he felt he could succeed. Home-

less and desperately poor, his health began to suffer. He wanted to weep sometimes but the privacy even to do that was denied him. He was a wanderer now, a tramp—yet he hadn't the experience even to be a successful tramp.

One day he met an Italian hobo, a man who had learned the wisdom of the wanderer, and although this man had only forty cents in the world he bought bread and milk with it and shared these with his unhappy countryman. The food eaten, the old hobo talked earnestly and wisely to Rodolpho. He told him that there must be somewhere in New York someone who would be disposed to help him. Whom had he met in New York? He must call on everyone he knew, even if he knew them only slightly, and ask for help, beg for it if necessary. There was no use in being proud when one was without a bed to sleep in or a bite to eat and in a strange land.

Rodolpho saw no alternative but to take the hobo's advice, and accordingly began his rounds of the acquaintances he had made. One young man, an Italian from Taranto who now played in the band at Maxim's Restaurant, suggested that Rodolpho should see the head waiter at the restaurant. This head waiter was also an Italian and had been at Bustanoby's when Rodolpho had frequented it. He went to Maxim's and the man remembered him. Rodolpho asked if he too might become a waiter, but his friend said that it took many years' training to qualify as a waiter at so famous a restaurant. Then he remembered that Rodolpho could dance. Would he care to come each evening and partner one or two of the ladies who dined at Maxim's? Wealthy women often came there alone or with escorts who did not dance. Such women welcomed a young partner to dance with, and what was more they often tipped very handsomely. Of course, it might not be work to suit Rodolpho's taste. Italians, he knew, had their pride, but Maxim's would provide him with meals and a room. They would even loan him a gramophone so that if he wished he might run dancing classes as a sideline. It would be good for custom. But, of course, if he didn't like the idea of being a professional dancing partner. . . .

Rodolpho's need was too desperate for him to refuse this offer. He took the job but not until he had left the restaurant did he realize that his evening clothes were in pawn. Having progressed

so far he refused to be beaten now. He accordingly called on another friend whom he knew to be passionately interested in dancing. He sold this friend a course of dancing lessons for which he secured in advance the sum of thirty dollars. With this he redeemed his evening attire.

And so it was that Rodolpho first began earning a living on the strength of his grace on the dance floor, his charm and his good appearance. For the first time he was cashing in on his physical attributes—by becoming a paid dancing man.

The proud young Italian who had expected to conquer America staked with £800 of the family funds had pocketed his pride. Forgetting all that he had been brought up to, he would glide around the dancing floor with a plump dowager or a neglected wife in his arms. He worked hard. Many women contracted to improve their dancing and took courses of lessons from him. They liked this suave, dark-eyed youth with the foreign mannerisms and intriguing accent. Moreover, they had him at their beck and call. He was, so to speak, 'laid on' with tea or dinner at Maxim's.

Chapter Four

RODOLPHO'S finances slowly improved and though he knew that he would never be able to reconcile his pride with his position at Maxim's he decided to be sensible. In reviewing his assets he saw that between him and destitution were his agricultural training and his ability as a dancer. So far the former had failed to earn him enough to live on, for only by chance had he got that exceptional position with Mr. Bliss. Normally it would be necessary to take menial land work at a low salary until he was older and better qualified. He was now nineteen. Dancing was showing swifter results. If it was not to his taste it was certainly better than picking insects off rose leaves.

Therefore, he decided to perfect his technique until something more agreeable came along. Long hours on the dance floor, week after week and month after month, adjusting his steps to suit every kind of partner, soon brought him to a degree of perfection. Another professional, a woman, was engaged, and with her he gave exhibition dances, which were well received by the patrons of the exclusive restaurant, and brought him more pupils for private lessons which meant more money. But these exhibitions also brought more calls to partner customers, and this was the aspect of the job that he detested most.

One evening he was called upon to dance with a beautiful young woman to whom he found himself strongly attracted. They became good friends and went out together whenever he could be free. Rodolpho told her of his struggles, his background and aims and, whether or not she was moved by affection for him, she nevertheless set about changing his life. She was a show-girl closely in touch with all the news of the entertainment world and it had come to her ears that Clifton Webb, who partnered Bonnie Glass, the most popular dancer in New York, was leaving the act. Miss Glass would have to find a new partner immediately as she was appearing at the exclusive New York Roof and had a heavy programme of engagements.

Rodolpho's new friend arranged a meeting with Bonnie Glass without telling the famous dancer that she had a prospective partner for her. She told Miss Glass that she had a handsome admirer she should meet. The meeting took place and after the first introductions had been made Rodolpho discreetly withdrew to enable his friend to approach the subject. He returned to find both women laughing and upon inquiring what they were laughing about he was told that Miss Glass had mistaken him for a South American millionaire.

But Bonnie Glass was shrewd. She saw in Rodolpho's dark and, to her, rather dangerous, good looks the attributes of a very suitable partner—providing his dancing was as good as his appearance. She invited him to call upon her the next day to practise some steps and he agreed to do so.

The following afternoon Bonnie Glass was so pleased with his proficiency that she engaged him on the spot at a salary of fifty dollars a week, and that same evening he appeared with her at three New York functions, including a hospital charity gala at Delmonico's and an engagement at another famous restaurant, Rector's. Although there had been no time for proper rehearsals the partnership was a great success. Rodolpho left his position at Maxim's.

Although the general idea of dancing for his living still did not appeal to him he had to admit that he had made a change for the better. Now he need not dance with any woman who was moved by a whim to call him over. Instead he danced before immense audiences in the variety halls of New York and before select gatherings in restaurants, cabarets and at private parties. Furthermore, he was partnering the best-known and most successful dancer in show business, and their revivals of old-time numbers like the 'cake-walk' were proving quite sensational successes.

Bonnie Glass opened a restaurant in New York called the Montmartre and to it came the cream of New York café society. While partnering her there his salary was raised to one hundred dollars a week. Dancing, he had to admit, was paying him better than gardening. Apart from the financial rewards he was also earning prestige in the entertainment world and meeting a wide public through tours out of town. On one memorable night in Washington, President Wilson attended. They introduced a new

waltz of their own creation into this show and received for it no less than sixteen curtain calls.

But while he whirled with his partner to ever greater success and revelled in the applause they received, a new trouble came into Rodolpho's mind. Italy had entered the war and he felt that he should be doing something for his country. Accordingly he took flying lessons with the intention of becoming a qualified pilot and returning to Italy to serve. His instruction course was cut short, however, by Bonnie's heavy engagement calendar and he had to give up his lessons. But a gain which was the direct result of those flying lessons was his meeting with Norman Kerry, a fellow flying pupil, who became his first close American friend.

Rodolpho was kept very busy—the Palace Theatre in New York and then off on a second tour of the eastern cities. Bonnie Glass opened another smart restaurant, the *Chez Fisher*, and they appeared there.

During this period a woman came into Rodolpho's life to stir in his heart for the first time the depth and wonder of the love he was capable of giving.

In the cities he had visited there had been friendships and parties and feminine charms gradually to bring about his transition from youth to manhood. He had written delicate notes, kissed and wooed and several times imagined himself to be in love. But when he met Mrs. Jack de Saulles, a wealthy young South American beauty, his passionate nature was truly awakened. He thought her to be his ideal and, despite the difference in their ages (for he was twenty-one, she older), he became devoted to her.

She had the dark, voluptuous beauty of the Latin, and she had travelled Europe a great deal and was able to talk intelligently of the beauty of Italy and the exciting life of Paris. Rodolpho was stimulated by her conversation and eager to learn from her. She did not like America, and, at the time, Rodolpho's bitter experiences were too recent for him to be enthusiastic about the country. These two exiles formed a companionship of the mind which was very satisfying.

Mrs. de Saulles's marriage to a Yale athlete and social favourite was very unhappy. Her husband neglected her and paid too much attention to other women. To forget, she liked to dance. And so, at various times in the course of several months, she appeared at the

cafés where Rodolpho and his partner entertained. Later in the evening she and Rodolpho would dance together and as she swayed with him to the rhythm of the tango she would leave behind her all thoughts of domestic unhappiness. Adoring her with the full force of his nature, Rodolpho was deeply grieved by the tragedy that later came into her life.

The newspapers began to concern themselves with numberless scandals attached to the de Saulleses' marriage, and then the headlines screamed the news that this unhappy woman had shot her husband. A separation had been imminent and they had quarrelled over custody of their child. In a moment when the man she had once loved, and now hated, threatened to take her child, the hot blood of her race had been roused and she had shot him.

A sensational trial followed. In the witness box Mrs. de Saulles was asked how she could go out dancing when her heart was supposed to be breaking. She replied that one did not dance with the heart. It was a relief to all who knew her when she was freed, most of all to the adoring youth who was never to see her again. Mrs. de Saulles disappeared from public notice and Rodolpho danced on to greater popularity, the flame that had burned so strongly in his breast dying down to become a mere memory.

Then Bonnie Glass married a wealthy business man, Ben Ali Haggin, and retired from dancing. Rodolpho found himself without a job.

This time it was much easier for him to find employment and he was soon touring the variety theatres with another well-known dancer, Joan Sawyer. For a season they danced in New York at the exclusive Woodmansten Inn.

But despite the good living and the colourful world in which he moved Rodolpho still wanted to give up dancing as a career. He remembered the sunlit vineyards of Italy and the happiness his people found in tilling the soil. When he had heard that in California there was a colony of Italian vinegrowers, his feeling for the land had returned in force. It was in his blood. He knew that he could not go on much longer in an artificial world of music and bright lights, dancing all night, sleeping during the day, and hardly ever feeling the warmth of the sun on his body. He had almost forgotten the satisfaction that comes from a day of physical toil and the pride of tending plants until they grow strong, healthy

and fruitful. Farming and the growing of things—that was the life he yearned for; circumstances alone had forced him to dancing. Now he was obsessed with the idea of reaching California where it might be possible to return to the way of life he understood and loved.

As soon as his contract with Joan Sawyer ended, Rodolpho sought a way of getting to the west coast which would not involve paying his own expenses. A solution presented itself when he was offered a part in a musical show travelling west on tour and though this meant dancing for a little while longer he accepted. Thus, at a salary smaller than he had been getting for his exhibition dancing, Rodolpho travelled west with *The Masked Model*, dancing his way back to the sun and the soil. But the show was not a success and collapsed long before they reached the coast. There was just enough money to provide the cast with tickets home and when asked where he wanted his ticket made out to Rodolpho replied: San Francisco.

On arrival there he went to the President of the Italian-American Bank, who had founded the colony of vinegrowers he had heard about. This old gentleman was understanding of Rodolpho's desire to get back to the land, but was sure he was not going the right way about it. He spoke to him at length and persuaded him to give up the idea until he was in a position to buy a piece of land for himself. He advised him to go back to his profession as a dancer until such time as he could make that investment.

Disappointed, though seeing the wisdom of the old gentleman's advice, Rodolpho rented a small apartment in San Francisco and looked about for work. He found it in a musical show entitled *Nobody Home* and stuck to it for three weeks before deciding that he simply would not go on dancing. He had no prospects, only a determination to endure even poverty again rather than continue to earn his living that way.

Anxious that his new job should be quite remote from the show world, Rodolpho applied for a position as a salesman with a firm which sold bonds on the instalment plan. The company gave him a two-week training course and then sent him out into the city as a man of business. He was moderately successful. Then the American Government introduced a Liberty Loan which had

the effect of completely ruining his company's business.

While engaged in bond selling he had met Norman Kerry again. This young man with whom he had made friends while they were both flying-pupils in the east had since become a Hollywood actor and was rapidly reaching the top. At this time he was leading man to none less than Mary Pickford and they had been shooting scenes in San Francisco for the film *The Little Princess*. Upon meeting Rodolpho again, Norman Kerry had advised him to try his luck in films, but the idea had not appealed to Rodolpho. Besides, he was confident of making a success of bond selling.

Meeting Norman Kerry, however, had reminded him of another ambition—to become a pilot; so that when his career as a man of business gradually faded, Rodolpho tried to join the British Royal Flying Corps which had set up a recruiting mission in the city. He applied to the head of this mission only to be told that he had defective vision in the left eye and would be rejected. When he announced to the head of the mission that he would travel across the border into Canada and join the R.F.C. there he was informed that he would be wasting his time; they too would reject him on the same grounds and he would have to pay his own fare home. Again Rodolpho was at a loss to know his next move.

His friends were still among show people, and it was to them that he went in search of new prospects. One Frank Carter, who was appearing in an Al Jolson touring show which had reached San Francisco, listened patiently to Rodolpho as the young Italian recounted his troubles. Rodolpho said ruefully that perhaps he should have taken Norman Kerry's advice and gone to Hollywood instead of pinning his faith in bond selling. Now it was too late; he hadn't the price of a ticket.

Carter at once put himself out to help. He took Rodolpho along to see Al Jolson and asked if it would be possible for him to travel with the company to Los Angeles. Jolson agreed, provided that there was a free berth on the train. It transpired that there was and, in addition, Carter took Rodolpho under his wing during the journey and paid all the incidental expenses.

Rodolpho had informed Norman Kerry of his good fortune and upon arrival at Los Angeles he found his friend waiting at the station to meet him. They drove to Hollywood and later in the day Kerry advised him as to the best methods of getting a start in

film business. A first essential was that he be noticed, Kerry advised, and that he should make an impression. Rodolpho replied that he could not afford to make an impression. He could barely afford to eat. Kerry stuck by him, installed him at the Alexandria Hotel, one of the best in the town, and loaned him money. He also began taking him around the film city, introducing him to people of importance.

Rodolpho found that a name like Guglielmi was not the best passport to success in film circles. Many people found it hard to pronounce and, apparently, harder still to remember, and so he adapted his Valentina to Valentino and used it as a professional surname. Rodolpho was frequently shortened to Rudolph by people he met, and so he let it go at that. But despite the fact that he met countless persons of importance in film circles, none seemed especially impressed. They appeared rather to write him off as just one of the thousands of young hopefuls who came their way every day. He was a handsome youngster, certainly, but even his looks were a disadvantage because they were distinctly foreign and the demand was for healthy young Americans as heroes of stories set against the American scene. This Mr. Guglielmi, or Valentino as he was styling himself, would look definitely out of place in them.

However, Rodolpho did eventually land a job—as an extra. He got three days' work at five dollars a day in the Emmett Flynn production, *Alimony*. It was hardly the realization of his aims but he was grateful for the opportunity to earn something. He had an uneasy conscience about the money Norman Kerry was spending to keep him at the Alexandria Hotel.

During the short period he worked in the studios on *Alimony* he met another extra who had dreams of one day becoming a famous star. Her name was Alice Taffe, a pretty, sweet-natured girl with a sensible and extremely practical outlook on life. She was not dismayed at having to work as a five dollars a day crowd player. She had confidence in her ability and knew that one day, given some luck, she would succeed. She tried to instil into Rodolpho the same firm conviction, but she did not find it easy. He didn't appear to know where he was going. She had *chosen* films as her career whereas, it seemed, he had drifted into them as a consequence of failure in other fields. He made no secret of the fact.

He told Alice Taffe that his heart lay in the land. He had become a dancer because he could not live by the land, and he was in Hollywood for no better reason than that the bond business had folded in San Francisco. To become a movie star had not been his dearest aim. Nevertheless, Rodolpho enjoyed talking to Alice Taffe, that attractively earnest girl who dreamt of movie glory.

When the job as crowd player ended he was again thrown back upon the patient generosity of Norman Kerry and this unsettled him more as time went by. One of the many successful people he met at this period was Hayden Talbot, the author of the screenplay of *Alimony*, the film in which he had played in the crowd. Rodolpho had been close to Talbot many times on the set during the production of *Alimony* without making an impression. Now, meeting him for the first time socially, Talbot declared that Rodolpho was exactly right for a part in a film story he was writing.

The news brought no great cheer, for Rodolpho knew that a long time can elapse between the writing of a screenplay and its production as a film. His own needs could not wait that long, and he was obliged to trudge from one casting agency to another introducing himself and all but begging for work as an extra. Everywhere he went the reaction was the same. The casting agents took one look at him and shook their heads. He was not the 'type' required for crowd work. He looked too definitely foreign. Of course, his type was right for an occasional villain's role—a 'heavy' as it is known in the business—but there were a host of experienced actors who specialized in that type of role and they would naturally be called upon first.

After enduring this treatment for week after week Rodolpho began to feel the strain. He could go on with it no longer. Rudolph Valentino must be shelved; he was proving the least paying of Rodolpho's ventures. He must turn to something that would bring immediate returns. He needed money urgently, because he was being kept. Day after day, week after week, Norman Kerry was paying the bills at the Alexandria Hotel, and Rodolpho felt ill at ease. Rather than continue to live off his friend he would take even a dancing engagement. If his face was his misfortune then he must allow his feet to keep him again.

Therefore, he moved to a small apartment in the town and

with this as his base began to look for work as a dancer. As before, his dancing skill saved the day and soon he was partnering Margorie Tain in a restaurant on the outskirts of Los Angeles.

The salary was poor by comparison with what he had earned in New York. There he had earned a hundred dollars a week partnering the finest dancers of the time, but here he was being paid only thirty-five dollars. Nevertheless, he was supporting himself once again, and the act was a great success. It spurred him on to apply to another restaurant, the Maryland in Pasadena, where he had hopes of receiving a higher fee as partner to Katherine Phelps. He was engaged by the Maryland and when its proprietor, who had been away on business in the east, returned and saw what an asset he was to the place he was offered a long-term engagement. But the salary proposed still fell short of what he had been paid in New York. Moreover, he did not wish to be tied to dancing for as long as a year, which was the term the contract proposed. He knew that it meant losing his livelihood to refuse this contract, but his freedom would be sacrificed if he accepted. Rodolpho turned down the offer and returned to Hollywood.

Chapter Five

RODOLPHO'S despondency returned after weeks in Hollywood without promise of any improvement in his fortunes. He had all but spent the proceeds of his dancing engagements when he met Emmett Flynn again.

Flynn, the producer for whom he had worked as an extra in *Alimony*, greeted him warmly and asked where on earth he had been. When Rodolpho had explained, Flynn told him that work was due to begin on the story that Hayden Talbot, the scriptwriter, had spoken about. The film, to be called *The Married Virgin*, featured a part especially written for him—a 'heavy', villainous foreign type, an Italian count. Talbot had had Rodolpho in mind while writing and it would have been difficult to find anyone so suited to the role.

Rodolpho's hopes revived when it transpired that the role was an important one, an excellent chance for someone who could claim as little experience as he. Now, he felt, he would be able to display his true ability and gain recognition. Of course, he was not the hero, but he would appear in many scenes. Until then his foreign appearance had been against him in his pursuit of work; now, it seemed, it had worked the opposite way. It was because he looked so foreign that he had got the part. The salary was fifty dollars a week, half what he had earned in New York at the peak of his success as a dancer. But this did not dismay him, for he was certain that this marked the beginning of his new career. When *The Married Virgin* was shown he would be *noticed*, which was so important, and offers of better roles would follow.

Rodolpho worked hard and well, and made a success of his part. But when *The Married Virgin* was completed legal difficulties arose and the film was not released to the exhibitors. His excellent work was not seen, and Valentino remained among the unknown.

Once more Rodolpho returned to the rounds of the agents' offices in search of work.

Life seemed inhumanly hard to him, but he could expect no sympathy from Hollywood. He was merely re-living the struggles experienced at one time or another by almost all the famous stars of the day. Clara Bow, Tom Mix, Barbara La Marr, Harold Lloyd, Gloria Swanson—all had known what it was to be an unknown in the movie capital, a seemingly unwanted young hopeful who made an agent's life unbearable; all had been grateful at some time for five-dollars-a-day work as an extra. It was all part of the glamour of Hollywood—to those who had made the grade. To the lonely, the penniless and the disillusioned, to that great crowd of hopefuls who still remained among the unknown, it was the bitter side of Hollywood—the hollowness in the stomach, the ache in the feet, the pain in the neck! Rodolpho had had enough of it. He was ready to quit—but for what?

Emmett Flynn again came to the rescue. That tireless bestower of good tidings brought Rodolpho news that caused his near deadened spirit to glow slightly again. He offered Rodolpho a role as an Italian ruffian in a film he was then making. It was so small a part that Flynn had hesitated to make the suggestion, for he remembered Rodolpho's good work in a role of much more importance in *The Married Virgin*. Had another foreign 'type' been available Flynn would have spared his friend the humiliation. As it was, however, Rodolpho leapt at the chance to earn five dollars a day.

It transpired that the assignment was to bring Rodolpho a great deal more than a few dollars. One day while working at the studios he passed by another set where Robert Leonard was directing a picture starring the famous Mae Murray. Rodolpho had met Bob Leonard once in New York, and so he called out a greeting to him. During the brief exchange of words between the two men Mae Murray studied Rodolpho. She made a mental note that this dark-eyed, suave young man with the fine physique and pleasant personality was the right type to play opposite her in *The Big Little Person*, her next film. Next day Bob Leonard telephoned the good news to Rodolpho.

Such was the luck of the business. To Rodolpho it seemed unbelievable that he could go up and down the ladder and up again so quickly, and to increase his joy further he learned that the picture had a period setting requiring that he should play in

costume. In one scene he would ride a horse and wear a suit of armour. He was actually going to be paid for playing again one of the favourite games of his childhood!

But he was disappointed when the studio property department produced a very cheap imitation of a suit of armour. In fact, he refused to wear it. He felt that to appear wearing such a tin-plate affair would cause the audiences to laugh at him rather than appreciate his performance. It would ruin the scene and harm his career. He decided, therefore, to make it his own responsibility to hire a real suit of armour and although the one he found did not fit him and he was staggered by its weight he was determined to wear the genuine thing. He arrived on the set struggling under its weight and needing the help of several property men before he could mount the bony mare provided as his steed.

The sun went in just as shooting was about to commence, but Rodolpho was asked to remain mounted lest the sun should break through. It did not break through for an hour, during which Rodolpho, lance in hand, sat astride the mare while his armour got hotter and hotter. He began to regret his desire for authenticity and wished he had been content with the imitation. But when the sun came out the scene was shot in ten minutes and Rodolpho was helped off his steed horribly bruised and nearly fainting from the effects of the heat. Nevertheless, he was able to smile, for he had been faithful to that spirit of realism in which the childhood games had been played long ago in Castellaneta.

All his work in *The Big Little Person* was liked by Robert Leonard and Mae Murray and in consequence he was chosen to play opposite her again in *The Delicious Little Devil*. The role was that of a young Irishman, and once more Rodolpho made an impression. He would have been used in a third Mae Murray film had he not been so definitely a 'type' player, but as it happened there was no role in the film to which he was suited. He was out of work again.

This time he had no need to do the rounds of the agencies, for he was beginning to be known in the business. Bob Leonard, who had every reason to be satisfied with his work, recommended him to Paul Powell, a producer who was beginning *A Society Sensation*. Rodolpho was given a supporting role in this film and paid at the rate of one hundred and twenty-five dollars a week. For the

In *The Eagle*
the Valentino mag-
netism was at work
at its most potent.
The screenplay was
adapted from a story
by Pushkin



As Juan Gallardo,
the bullfighter,
in *Blood and Sand*,
based on the novel
by Vicente Ibanez

Right Valentino as he
appeared in *The
Four Horsemen of the
Apocalypse*



Centre In costume for
The Sainted Devil

Right A sheik-like
study of the star



first time his film earnings had exceeded what he had received as a dancer in New York.

After the film's completion Powell selected him for a leading part in a second film, *All Night*, and raised his pay to a hundred and fifty dollars. Now, it seemed, there was no looking back. Four important roles in rapid succession suggested that at last he had secured a footing in the industry. Being Rudolph Valentino was beginning to pay. He was already a moderately successful villain, a recognized 'heavy'. Then an outbreak of influenza closed down every studio.

Rodolpho was not greatly worried because he had saved some money. He went to stay with friends in San Francisco to avoid getting the flu. But he returned before the plague was over and suffered a severe attack which kept him in bed for five weeks and lost him much weight. When he returned to the studios again all that he was offered was a minor supporting role in *A Rogue's Romance*.

The assignment amounted to very little, but he was glad to take it. During the course of production he was gratified to be told by the producer, Earl Williams, that he had ability and might one day be an important name. *A Rogue's Romance* was the first film in which Valentino danced and in these sequences Rodolpho was allowed full authority to decide close-ups and camera angles.

After this there were more bit parts in minor productions and an engagement at seventy-five dollars a week in support of Dorothy Dalton, a well-known star. Then Paul Powell, who had used him in two films, arranged a meeting with D. W. Griffith, already a very important producer, and again it was Rodolpho's 'type' rather than his acting ability that got him a job in *Out of Luck*, Griffith's new film starring Dorothy Gish. Once more he was cast as the 'heavy'—further proof, had Rodolpho needed any, that there was still no demand for Valentino, the romantic actor. Only when his 'type' was needed would he stand a chance of being engaged. And the need for sinister foreign-looking 'heavies' did not arise often enough to provide Rodolpho with any save a most precarious livelihood.

Another long spell of unemployment would have followed *Out of Luck* if he had not been willing to return once again to dancing. D. W. Griffith offered him a few months of work

dancing in the stage production which preceded the Hollywood screening of his film, *The Greatest Thing in Life*. The engagement actually lasted three months and he was paid one hundred dollars a week—and then he was unemployed again.

Slowly but surely Rodolpho was beginning to tire of this up and down existence. Even when he earned good money he found it impossible to save. Debts accrued during the no-work periods and high Hollywood living costs ate away what remained. In any case, he had a natural predilection for extravagance when he had money. When he had money he spent freely, entertained those who had helped him, and sought future work by being sociable to people of influence. All this quickly melted any funds he managed to save during hundred-dollar-a-week dance engagements and, moreover, left him depressed and low in spirit, for he got no kick out of Hollywood society. It was glass thin and as brittle as plaster; it had no warmth nor depth. It was horribly artificial and he had neither enjoyed himself among it nor been really accepted by it. Although he had been in America for six years, he still had not completely adapted himself to the American way of life. Of those Hollywood people who knew him several thought him eccentric, even effeminate, mistaking his love of bright and colourful clothes for an exhibitionist streak in his character. He was not consciously an exhibitionist and his manner of dress did not seem conspicuous to him—one brought up in a land of gay and colourful masculine apparel. Typical of a young southern Italian, he adored gay shirts and warm-hued neckwear, but his clothes were remarked upon in Hollywood, often causing him to be a subject of ridicule.

In this atmosphere he felt friendless and alone. He had many acquaintances but he could name no true friend, except for Norman Kerry. In periods without work or income he remained in his rooms, preferring inexpensive solitude to invitations to eat or drink at other people's expense. There were times when he was exceedingly lonely, a deeper and more hurtful loneliness than he had known in New York in those first weeks following his arrival. For now he was twenty-four and his needs and desires and feelings had changed.

There was no longer even the cheer and encouragement of those letters from home. His mother had never lost faith in him.

She had written week after week, year after year, minimizing her own troubles, mentioning nothing of her illness, remaining silent on the subject of the family's misfortunes. Then the letters suddenly stopped. Her death had been a terrible blow. Even the will to succeed diminished noticeably. It all seemed less worth while simply because that wise little French woman would not be alive to witness and share in whatever success lay ahead—if, in fact, it lay ahead.

Often he thought of Castellaneta. He wondered whether he would not have been happier had he remained there among people he understood and who understood him. Neither fame nor fortune were to be found there, but there was a warmth there, a sympathy, a love upon which to build a satisfactory personal life. By now he might have had a small farm and a little white house and a smiling dark-haired Italian wife to tend his home and bear his children. That, as every Italian knew, was a man's birthright.

In his solitude, marriage and the kind of life that had been his father's became the central theme of his longing. And it was while he was in this frame of mind that he made the first of the great mistakes that were to ruin completely his chances of ever realizing true happiness or of building a life for himself such as most other men know.

It began at a Hollywood party. The company included a host of celebrated players and executives. He was taken by an influential friend wishing to do him a good turn. Rodolpho hoped—as he had hoped before at hundreds of similar parties—that he would be noticed and set upon the road to success. At this party he met Jean Acker, an actress enjoying considerable success in films. Here was a woman, Rodolpho told himself, who had succeeded in that same sphere in which he was still struggling and sometimes nearly starving. He asked Jean Acker about her success. How did it feel to be a star? Was success as wonderful as it seemed to one so far from attaining it? And Rodolpho was surprised to learn that Jean Acker was a very unhappy woman. She had achieved material success but like many another in Hollywood she had missed something else in the process. She had loved unwisely—and she had been forced to turn her back on the man she adored. Rodolpho was profoundly moved.

It was all too painfully recent for Jean Acker to speak much

of her trouble without considerable anguish and distress, but she gave Rodolpho the essential details. She was a woman desperately alone. Applauded everywhere, admired, envied even, she had no partner, no loving companion, no one to whom she could turn for the love and sympathy only a man can give to a woman.

They talked a long while at this party and then resolved to forget sadness for the evening. They met again and talked again. They met at parties where the music and the laughter about them seemed to mock their sadness; they met alone in quiet places where it was easy to comfort one another. How well Rodolpho understood her loneliness; his life too was empty.

They confided their true feelings and each being in similar need they understood one another. Rodolpho, the gallant knight meeting the lady in distress, was moved to affection as well as sympathy and yearned to rescue her, to make her happy again. Jean Acker, a woman on the rebound from a lost love, drew close to the handsome knight with the dark and solemn eyes who understood her so well. In him she might forget her unhappy love affair. They became firm friends and frequently went about together and found brief happiness in their meetings.

One morning while out riding they paused in the shade of an old tree. The countryside was still. In the silence Rodolpho began to feel that here was the woman to make his life complete. If this was not a great love, at least here was someone who had known the same pain of loneliness that he had felt, a woman who had achieved all the material success the world could offer and yet still longed for the contentment of a happy personal life. She was a star and he was still a nobody—but if they were to make each other happy would it not be right to marry? He kissed her and then he proposed.

To Jean Acker, Rodolpho was not the man of her dreams. She had already known that man—and had lost him. Rodolpho was a handsome youngster who understood her; that was all. He would be there to provide affection in lonely moments and thereby fill the empty space in her life. She did not love him, she knew, but she believed that he could make her happy. She said that she would marry him—at once, if he wished. They kissed again and set off for home.

On the way they met some friends whom they told of their

engagement and plans to be married soon. The friends announced that they had arranged an elaborate reception for the next day and, if Jean Acker wished, she and Rodolpho could be married right away and make the party their wedding celebration.

And so it was. They entered into marriage, they made their vows, and then they drank and laughed and danced. They thought they had solved their problems; that they need never know loneliness again.

But the marriage vows did not make Rodolpho any different. He was just the handsome young man who understood and consoled—and Jean Acker had known someone who would have been so much, much more than that. She could not drive that memory out. The more she tried the more virulently the memory returned. She realized then that she could not go through with it. Before even the party had ended, she had left Rodolpho. The romance was over, the marriage stillborn. That was 5th November, 1919. Their separation was officially announced on 6th December.

Rodolpho and Jean Acker remained friends. Each understood what had happened. She returned to her place as a star; he went back to the struggle—and a role in a film called *Once to Every Woman*.

During his engagement for this picture he managed to put by a little money, but these savings dwindled and eventually disappeared during the long period of unemployment which followed. Then he got a role in a film entitled *Passion's Playground* in which his close friend, Norman Kerry, was the star. He was cast in the role of Kerry's brother.

These two men had become like brothers in real life. Rodolpho had relied a great deal on his friendship for Kerry in the many lonely moments he had known in Hollywood, and upon his friend's help in so many penurious days.

Now Rodolpho took another dancing engagement, appearing in the stage prologue to another D. W. Griffith film, *Scarlet Days*. Then he grew a moustache! This was an act of desperation, for the successful Norman Kerry wore one and Rodolpho felt that the wearing of one might kindle his own popularity. But it did not, so he shaved away his moustache.

Later on an offer came along to revive his hopes again—yet another role as 'heavy', this time in a film called *The Great*

Moment. The film was to be made not in Hollywood but in New York so that Rodolpho found himself travelling back to the scene of his past successes and failures. But what was very encouraging about the new job was the salary. For his role in *The Great Moment* he was to receive four hundred dollars a week, the most he had ever earned. Perhaps, after all, he was destined to climb the ladder of this new industry.

This feeling of reviving confidence was so strong in him that when he heard that Metro had bought the rights of the book, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, and were to make an epic production of it, he called on Maxwell Karger, their production chief in New York, and asked to be considered for the leading role. He had read the book, he explained, and felt that he was eminently suited to play the role of Julio, the young man around whom the story is woven.

Karger was polite and took his name and address and details of experience, but gave no hint that he was to be given any more consideration than the many other actors, some very celebrated, who coveted the role.

The Great Moment came to an end. Having heard no more from Metro, Rodolpho agreed to portray yet another 'heavy', this time in a film entitled *The Fog*. But he was impatient to know what was happening in connection with *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. It was a fine story and the role of Julio was a star-maker. Metro had stated that they intended spending an unprecedented sum on the production, yet still had announced no player's name for the leading role. Whoever got it would be made.

The moment that *The Fog* finished, Rodolpho called again at the New York offices of Metro. This time he saw Mr. Karger's brother-in-law, the company's casting director, who asked him almost at once if he would care to play the leading role in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*!

Rodolpho was for a moment too astonished to speak. He had been hoping, hoping, hoping—and now that the thing he had hoped for had been bluntly offered to him he found it difficult to believe. Perhaps the casting director was playing a heartless joke. Many a star had wanted the role. Why should it be given to someone who had played only the 'heavy', the conventional villain? Yet if it were true . . . to escape from the groove he was in, to play

the hero in a movie of such magnitude would change the whole course of his career. Surely it was just a bit of tasteless fun on the part of this man.

Rodolpho turned to go. Then the casting director spoke again. The part was his if he wanted it. Quickly, Rodolpho replied that he would be overjoyed to create the role of Julio.

When the casting official asked him how much he had been earning, Rodolpho replied that he was getting four hundred dollars a week. This seemed to present a problem. Metro were prepared to pay three hundred and fifty dollars a week. Rodolpho readily accepted the lower salary. The chance to play Julio was far more important, he had decided. He would have worked for nothing in the film, and, after all, he wasn't really used to a weekly pay cheque for four hundred dollars.

The contract was signed and Rodolpho was sent to see June Mathis, who had written the scenario from the novel by Vincente Ibanez and was in charge of production.

Now it was that he learned why there had been no long interviews and discussions, no doubts about his ability to play the part of Julio.

The casting of the film was entirely in the hands of June Mathis, and she had seen Rodolpho in a small role in an unimportant film called *The Eyes of Youth*. Rodolpho could hardly recall having worked in it. Indeed, his part in it had been so small that June Mathis had had to see the picture several times before making up her mind. But once she had decided she made it her mission to ensure that none other than he played Julio. Again it was his 'type' which had influenced her. He had the dark and sombre eyes of Julio; he was the right age, and he could dance. Julio was a South American Latin, and Rodolpho's dark skin, sensitive features and foreign mannerisms would portray him as no American would. In the living image of Rodolpho, June Mathis saw the Julio she wanted to create on the screen. This meeting confirmed her earlier conviction. She had met opposition from almost everyone concerned in the production, but she had refused to consider anyone else. All the arguments Rodolpho had expected to meet had already been dealt with by June Mathis. Upon the slender evidence of his performance in *The Eyes of Youth*, a performance which even Rodolpho could not remember very

clearly, she had staked her position and reputation in the film industry—and the success of a very important production.

Now, at their first meeting, she seemed satisfied that she had been right in her choice, although it had cost her dear in terms of broken friendships and harsh arguments with business colleagues. She impressed upon Rodolpho that she had complete confidence in him. His physical appearance, she said, was his biggest asset, but he must nevertheless put into his performance all the technique he had learned the hard way in Hollywood. This film could make him a star. It could also, she warned, be a disastrous end to both their careers. It was up to him to prove that she had not fought these powerful forces in vain. They shook hands warmly and parted.

Rodolpho walked into the New York evening feeling light-headed with happiness and allowed the flickering lights of Broadway to bewitch him into a mood of carefree enjoyment. What an exciting city this was—if you were a success or perhaps going to be. He had never really liked New York but now it appeared not so bad after all. Yet he did not trust it, remembering his days as an underdog there. Cities, he had long ago decided, were like film producers—they thrive on the success of others but denied the intruder, the unrecognized, the one still struggling for a place in the sun, and the wretched lot of the underdog was made even harder by this disregard, this distaste even, for his condition. But there were exceptions, people like June Mathis, and Rodolpho muttered a prayer of thanks for them, for those big-hearted, big-minded people in high places who nevertheless now and then opened a door and let the stranger in.

That evening Rodolpho celebrated.

A few days later he began the long train journey back to California. During the five days he was travelling he read and read again the script of *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. He was thrilled by it. He wanted to cry out with excitement. For the role of Julio might have been written for him, so in tune was it with his feelings and temperament and appearance. By the time he reached Hollywood he was more a living Julio than the hard-pressed actor who had travelled east for *The Great Moment*. Valentino, against whom doors had been closed for so long, at last possessed the key with which to open them.

Chapter Six

THE Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse told the story of Julio Desnoyers, a young man who had been brought up on the Argentine pampas by his wealthy grandfather. The old man favoured Julio to his other grandsons and allowed him to live a life of ease and luxury, knowing wealth with none of its responsibilities all his youth.

Julio grew up to be a pleasure-loving young man and spent most of his time dancing in the Argentine cafés. There was no need for Julio to devote time to the building of his future because his grandfather had told him he would inherit great wealth and property.

But the old man died without leaving a will, the property was divided among various branches of the family, the land sold and the proceeds shared. Julio, although left comfortably rich, had no root and the estate he had expected would never be his. He went to France, his father's country, but still found no direction. He took up painting but was not serious with it, and soon he slid back into the easy-going mode of life he had followed in the Argentine.

At the time of the outbreak of the First World War Julio was deeply in love with a married woman, Marguerite Laurier. She loved him in return but when her husband was called to the front, loyalty to him caused her to give up Julio. He was left alone in Paris, a lost young man with nothing of substance in his life, while all about him people were being inspired by love of country to do noble deeds.

For a time Julio told himself that the war was not the concern of someone brought up an Argentinian. Then he met Marguerite again. Her husband had been blinded on active service. She was desperately unhappy. For Julio this was the culmination of so much other misery he had seen, personal tragedies brought about by the war, that he was suddenly revolted by the horror of all that had befallen France. He joined the French Army and soon after moving up to the front was killed.

When Rex Ingram, the director, and June Mathis began work on this film they did not intend to build up the leading players into the main attraction. Their performances were to be adequate to tell the story with sincerity but it was the story that was to matter. The tragedy of war, as personified in Ibanez's notable and widely acclaimed novel, was to be the main theme. But before many scenes had been shot it became clear that Valentino's performance was stealing the thunder. Obviously, audiences would be far more interested in the fate of Julio than in the point of the story itself. In fact, the story was becoming a vehicle for Valentino, whereas it had been planned that he should merely help to build the story as a whole.

In the middle of the production June Mathis began re-writing the script so that all the incident and action moulded itself around Julio. It had to be that way, for the young Rodolpho's portrayal of Julio, for ever lonely and wistful, for ever struggling with the problem of where his allegiance lay, gave a haunting sweetness to the character and completely captured the imagination. Valentino had given the character a degree of vivid poignancy the like of which even the author had not achieved.

Rodolpho enjoyed every moment of his work on the picture and the enthusiasm with which he worked infected everyone concerned in the production. A new star was being born, and even in the cynical reaches of a film studio that was something to stir the highest and the lowest. Valentino was living the part and all who saw him at work before the cameras sensed something of the heartfelt sincerity he was putting into his performance. Here was not just another screen flapper in a copy-book role of the heart-throb genre but an actor treating the cameras with respect for what they were: the eyes of the millions of ordinary people who sat and watched alone. Valentino was something new and one day he might be great.

What greatly added to Rodolpho's pleasure during the production was the fact that his leading lady, Alice Terry, was one and the same with Alice Taffe, the youngster he had met in the crowd during the filming of *Alimony*. Both had been extras then and now they could look back together on the hard times they had both known.

When *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* was completed

Rodolpho was complimented on every side by all who had been connected with the filming. From adjoining stages where other movies were made came other players, some of whom he had never met before, to congratulate him upon what they had heard was a fine performance. At last he felt that he had achieved something. Hollywood society, that fraternity for which success was the key to club membership, began to welcome him now, though he had no great heart for its dubious attractions. Moreover, he was still quite poorly off and increased living costs had resulted from his improved professional position. He was worried by this, for he had thought that now he would be able to command a star's salary. After all, he had earned more as a 'heavy' than in playing the lead in this epic picture. Other stars were being paid considerably more than the three hundred and fifty dollars he was getting.

When Metro offered him the lead in another picture, *Uncharted Seas*, he accepted but asked for a rise in salary. The company refused. They said that as yet he was an unknown quantity as far as the box-office was concerned and as such was not worth any more than the three hundred and fifty they were paying him.

Rodolpho was shocked by this refusal, but he went on with his work. He consoled himself with the hope that when *The Four Horsemen* was publicly shown his ability would be recognized and that then the financial rewards of star status would be irrefutably his.

During the production of *Uncharted Seas*, in which he played opposite Alice Lake, the great Nazimova was at work on an adjacent set. This impressive mistress of early screen tragedy was at the height of her acclaim. Rodolpho met her often and she liked him. She too had heard of his performance in *The Four Horsemen* and now began to consider him as the leading man in her next film, *Camille*. His 'type' was right again; this young man of romantic though unmistakably European appearance might make a wonderful Armand.

The last word in the casting of her films did not lie with Nazimova. She had to consult Natacha Rambova, her art director. Natacha would say yes or no, and that would be the end of it; she always knew best. Nazimova had implicit faith in her.

When Natacha gave a decisive judgment anyone who countered it was wrong. Natacha was *always* right.

It was not only Natacha's strong character that had impressed itself upon Nazimova, causing the distinguished actress to place unquestioning faith in her judgment. Natacha Rambova designed all the sets for Nazimova's films and they alone were more than sufficient proof of her ability and integrity as an artist. Rambova sets were extremely modernistic and always received heavy criticism when the films for which she had designed them were shown. The adjective the critics most commonly applied was 'fantastic', yet they were not so much fantastic as, for the nineteen-twenties, ahead of their time. This Natacha knew, but she was far too great an artist to compromise, to allow criticism to influence her art. She *knew* that she was right, and if the whole world cried out that she was wrong then the whole world was lagging sadly behind. Nazimova understood Natacha completely. The celebrated star often said that she herself should have been born American instead of Russian, and that her art director should have been born Russian instead of American. Then their respective nationalities would have been more in tune with their characteristics and personalities.

For Natacha Rambova was an American. She had been born Winifred Shaunessy in Salt Lake City. Although she had never speculated on what her life might have been like but for the fact of her mother's second marriage, this fortuitous event certainly had the effect of lifting her out of a comfortable middle-class obscurity into a new life amid enormous wealth. She moved with her mother and stepfather, Richard Hudnut, an American cosmetic millionaire, to New York and then to Europe, and she adapted the benefits of the transition to satisfy the deep yearning of her truly artistic soul. She found herself more at ease in the European way of life than she had ever been in that of her native U.S.A. A born artist, she caught the inspiration of an older civilization when she heard her first operas, saw her first tapestries, admired her first paintings. And it was while wandering about the ancient cities of Europe that Winifred Shaunessy Hudnut first realized that there was a world open to her quite apart from the one which is the lot of the majority of women.

If most women could find the whole direction and meaning of

their lives in a husband and children, Winifred Hudnut certainly could not. This new world into which she had wandered offered so much more. She sensed the thrill of it when she was among great paintings, when all about her were masterpieces hundreds of years old and still earning praise for their creators through the pleasure they gave. She realized the depth of satisfaction those artists of the past must have known. She sensed the power they must have felt in being able to produce such wonders for generations of mankind to marvel at, and she saw that the ordinary life of the average being, devoted to keeping alive and enjoying the short years of existence, was too small, too purposeless for her. And with the supreme egomania of the true artist, Winifred determined that her lifetime would be devoted to the producing of greater beauty. There would be no room in it for the ordinary human feelings that last but a short time; love, sorrow, happiness, hate, these were but wasters of God's precious gift of time in which to create and build for perfection. There would be no room in her life for anything save art. It would be pledged completely to creating beauty. There might be no memory of her save some permanent contribution to the world of art.

She was sent to school in England and then, selecting the ballet as her first field of artistic conquest, she joined the Kosloff *entourage* to be trained. Kosloff, of the Imperial Russian Ballet, at once recognized the artist in her. As he too was living for his art he understood her as no ordinary person could. He recognized a young woman who could coldly sacrifice all that life ordinarily meant if it should further the perfecting of her own self-expression, and Kosloff worked hard to help her.

She wanted to become a great dancer and to that purpose they laboured. No matter how arduous were the exercises, she never complained. Eventually Kosloff was rewarded by seeing poise and grace develop in her and he praised her for her exquisite dancing. But the ballet was not everything to this unique young woman. It perfected her movements, gave a rare beauty to them, made her superior to the masses of her sex. Now she changed her name to Natacha Rambova and forthwith set about a conquest of new fields of art.

Working for Kosloff were many of the finest European designers and artists of their time. Natacha absorbed everything they

had to teach. She learned painting, drawing, the science of colours and a philosophy of living which sublimated everything to the aims and ideals of art. During this most formative period she lived among artists whose existence was built around the maxim that she already had accepted—that self-expression through art is the only worth-while thing in life.

She returned to America with Kosloff and was his partner during a ballet tour. She knew the thrill of having her skill applauded, but she was by no means completely satisfied. She had other talents and she wanted a chance of expressing them too.

Upon arriving in Hollywood with Kosloff she saw in the film city a place which might provide her with some of the opportunities she sought. Film production involved so many skills, so varied a selection of creative talents. She could act—and did. But that was not a sufficient outlet for her need to build and create and strive for greatness and beauty. But to design sets for films would be a way of showing her work to the world, an artist working upon a canvas millions saw and a few appreciated. With ruthless enterprise she began making a place for herself in the industry. She was fortunate in meeting Nazimova, an artist with a European background, who was able to understand her completely, and Natacha found an early chance to express herself in this fascinating new sphere by designing the sets and costumes for Nazimova's films.

And it was to this brilliant woman that Nazimova took her candidate for the role of Armand in *Camille*. Rodolpho, fresh from a scene in *Uncharted Seas*, went to the interview wearing arctic clothing.

There was mica, used as artificial snow, sticking to his eyebrows and to the furs of his hooded jacket. Natacha instructed him to take off his hood. Her manner was as frigid as the scene he had just left. She studied his features from various angles and said that his hair was quite wrong. Armand, lover of Camille, would not have hair so slicked down with such an excess of pomade.

She led him across to the make-up department where he was given a shampoo. That done she took a pair of curling tongs and waved his hair slightly. He submitted, though with much misgiving, for his hair was a great pride to him and he had always worn

it brushed flat and shiny with dressing. No one else could have persuaded him to change it, but with this strange woman argument was impossible. Here she was calmly changing it herself. In a detached, efficient way she did as she pleased and he could not find it in him to object. When she studied the effect she had created with the tongs and make-up box she said that he was suited to the part—and then she left. The matter had been decided.

This meeting was not the first time Rodolpho had seen Natacha Rambova. Previously, he had noticed her on Nazimova's sets and had wondered about her. Nowhere, even in a city to which beauties flocked in their thousands and from all over the globe, had he seen so beautiful a woman. She had the poise of an empress and there was a subtle beauty in her every movement. He had never heard her speaking in conversation on those occasions when he had seen her on the set (for there was no one in the studios except for Nazimova to whom she could speak of things which interested her) and when he heard her voice for the first time she was giving orders. When he heard her voice on a subsequent occasion she was again giving orders, in a dignified, unruffled manner. She never appeared to discuss what should be done; she simply stated what should be done—and she left. Natacha did not need suggestions, only obedience.

Rodolpho fell in love with her—and was tortured by the impossibility of it. He felt almost childish beside her. He was still at heart a simple Italian youth and he still embraced in his dreams of the future a picture of a devoted wife, a home and children. Yet he was dazzled by the beauty of this gifted woman. She was like a goddess to him, and like a goddess she was unapproachable. Her eyes looked down at him from a world of knowledge and saw him for what he was—but when he looked at her eyes he saw nothing but their beauty. They were inscrutable, giving no hint of what Natacha Rambova was thinking, showing no trace of emotion. Emotion could destroy logic, so there was no room for it. And yet Rodolpho fell in love with her.

When *Uncharted Seas* was finished he came into contact with Natacha a great deal. She was constantly on the set during the filming of *Camille* and frequently called him aside to draw his attention to mistakes he had made. But nowhere could he see any fault in her. She was the most glorious creature ever to come into

his life and he obeyed her without a word. In an attempt to win her approval he showed eagerness to do her favours. She had only to mention that she required something and he would be there to fetch it. But never once, at this stage, did she show any recognition of the obvious—that he was fast becoming enslaved by her.

As *Camille* came near to completion, Rodolpho grew bolder. When Natacha worked late at the studios he also stayed late. He had acquired an old car and he placed it at her disposal when she thought of returning home. He began giving her flowers in the hope of receiving a smile but was only thanked by Natacha, who went on with her work. If she had no pity for the emotional state of the handsome youngster, neither did she find him a nuisance or an embarrassment. Her cold reasoning had taught her to be untroubled by such sentimental trivialities. Her work was important; that was all. Her mind was above all else. She was tolerant of his attempts to express his devotion and understood that he knew no other way. He was of the world of passion and deep feeling and she expected someone of that sphere to behave precisely in this manner, but she gave him no encouragement.

Rodolpho was destined to break through Natacha's icy demeanour, though it was to take a long time. It happened eventually at a costume ball given at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles and he owed his success to his skill as a dancer.

At the ball Natacha arrived dressed as Cleopatra, a costume that suited her personality magnificently, and Rodolpho wore the Argentinian costume he had worn in the early sequences of *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. They danced the tango together and, losing themselves in the mood of the dance, they discovered something they had in common. Dancing was a passion with Natacha while Rodolpho for the first time appreciated its thrill when he danced with this exquisite woman. In each other they recognized a partner far above the average and while they danced they forgot everyone about them, drifting deep into the ecstasy of movement. From that day forward Natacha was more favourably disposed to Rodolpho.

They were both fine dancers and they both worked in films—there were two common links. Apart from them there was little else. Conversation between them sometimes became painfully urbane and then Natacha froze. True, Rodolpho had seen many of the



The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse—
the first truly starring role Rudolph Valentino played. It was
an acting success for him, remembrance of which is often over-
shadowed by the legend later created by *The Sheik*



Valentino and Alice Terry
in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, the film based on Vicente
Ibanez' novel of love and disillusionment, set against a background
of the first world war

artistic treasures of Europe but not with the trained eye of Natacha Rambova. He would have to learn a lot before he could become a companion to her in the fullest sense of the word. But he was young and he adored her. She was his goddess and, therefore, he saw no barrier of pride to prevent him learning from her. Sometimes, when he drove her home from the studios she invited him in for a meal. They would talk, and he would learn. His ideas were still unformed. He had never thought very deeply about anything and had no decided tastes. Neither had he any clear idea of where he was going. Art meant little to him. Only yesterday it seemed he had starved because he could find no work. Was he really an artist now? It seemed to him that he was merely someone with a job. He had drifted into acting and was working hard, but if that profession proved difficult again he would quit it for something else. He was determined not to starve.

On the other hand Natacha knew where she was going—and would starve rather than deviate from her ambition. Because of the wealth of her parents she had never been beset by the grim alternatives of work or want. Instead she had cultivated her mind and pledged her soul to artistic ideals. Come what may she could never betray the teachings of the masters. Success was everything to her, and there was no sacrifice too great for its achievement. A lonely way? Perhaps—for there were few of her mind in Hollywood where commercial success was god. Free of the bonds which tied ordinary people to the worship of financial success, she had a nobler end in view—artistic success. Few understood her way of thinking and most people with whom she came into contact disliked her because of her cold manner, but she did not mind the unpopularity. She was mistress of herself and her ambitions. Yet she had found pleasure in dancing with Rodolpho, and pleasure was rare for a woman who demanded such high standards. So she drew close to him.

Worshipping her, yielding to her outlook on all things, Rodolpho became entranced. Those divine lips were never wrong. Advice from her was something to be acted upon. Her views gradually became his, her knowledge day by day was imparted to him, and he acquired her tastes in everything. Before long he began to see life altogether differently.

This new strength Natacha gave him impelled Rodolpho

forward to a decision to better himself financially. The result was a disagreement with Metro. Although he had now played in three major productions for them, he was receiving only four hundred dollars a week. His employers had raised his wage by fifty dollars but this was still far below the salaries paid to other leading players. That he was worth more he did not doubt. Neither did Natacha. *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* had already been released in the eastern cities and had met with an enthusiastic reception. Critics were hailing him as the discovery of the year and the picture as a whole was receiving appraisal from serious critics as well as those who noticed only films that bid for popular acclaim. It was, in fact, an all-round winner—with the public and with the critics. Soon *Uncharted Seas* and *Camille* would be on show to reap the benefits of the first success. He was a star. It was deplorable that his employers did not reward him for this fine work in terms of a much better salary. Furthermore, when he began work on a fourth film, *The Conquering Power*, he found that much of the original script prepared by June Mathis had been changed, and he felt that this new version was inferior to the original. So did Natacha. What would Natacha do? She never argued about what was right; she acted on what she knew was right. Rodolpho parted company with Metro.

Shortly after its presentation in the east *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* was shown in Hollywood. Rodolpho and Natacha attended the first showing together and before they had seen much of the film they both sensed the tremendous triumph it was for Rodolpho. There were tears in his eyes as he sat there in the darkness of the Hollywood cinema. He knew now what this would mean to him. After seven years of struggle in a country he had come to as a stranger, years of frequent penury and living on charity, times in which he had nearly starved and had walked friendless streets without the fare to ride, months of dancing into the early hours, sleepless days in dingy rooming houses; after seven years of struggle he was at the top.

In that moment he also realized, as unhappy Jean Acker had done, that success meant nothing without someone to share it. And, in the darkness, his hand sought Natacha's. He felt the slim white hand meet his, press his fingers and release them again. It was the first sign of feeling she had shown him since they met.

She did not turn her head from the screen. In that moment what the world thought of him mattered little compared to this gesture from the woman he adored.

The film ended, the lights went up and the applause was overwhelming. Yet Rodolpho hardly heard it. Compared with the approval he saw in Natacha's eyes it was of no importance at all.

Chapter Seven

IT soon became evident to Rodolpho what success on the screen really meant. He suddenly found himself regarded as a valuable commercial property, a state of being which brought him little immediate financial gain though apparently made fortunes for others.

The Married Virgin, the first film in which he had played a sizeable part, was now issued with Rudolph Valentino billed as its star. This was annoying, for Rodolpho's part in it had not been the lead, nor even the hero, but the 'heavy' and in recent pictures he had left that type behind. But his name was big now and the company (which had paid him a mere fifty dollars a week for his work in the film) was cashing in on the fact.

Vincente Ibanez's novel, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, was selling by the hundreds of thousands. The film's success had put it in the class of record best-sellers.

The fashion industry was finding Valentino the most potent sales force of the decade. The bolero, which had been a part of his costume in *The Four Horsemen*, was adapted to feminine fashion and became the rage.

American men were copying the Valentino appearance and paying more attention to their grooming, sleeking their hair smooth with pomade until it shone. The Valentino 'type', which had once seemed too un-American, was now dictating the American type.

The tango was sweeping the country since Valentino had danced it in the film's early scenes and music publishers profited greatly by the demand for more and more.

Everything he did was news. Everything he did was twisted to make a story, sometimes a good story, sometimes one in dubious taste. The restaurants he dined at became at once the most fashionable. Everything he used—from toilet soap to fountain pens—became the subject of intense publicity campaigns. The nation was booming, living on a rising curve of high-powered

prosperity and the advertising industry was rich, ruthless and immensely powerful. Valentino was the most exploitable entity that had ever fallen into its lap. The gossip writers scrutinized his every public act, elucidating, magnifying, distorting. If he ordered a small meal in a restaurant simply because he was not hungry, rumours initiated by the columnists spread that he was dieting. Reports circulated of his taste for highly coloured clothes and he was said to be foppish. When he appeared in public immaculately attired he was termed a lounge lizard. Aided by the long bright beam of the publicity man's torch the public had started to explore the life of a new celebrity. But this was only the beginning.

Bewildered by the sensation which followed his rise to stardom, Rodolpho turned to Natacha, who was never bewildered by anything. He hated the tone of some of the publicity and was helpless to do anything about it. But Natacha was never troubled by such foolishness and he found comfort in her companionship and composure.

Following his break with Metro an offer of more work came along on terms that were a decided improvement upon those he had previously known. He was offered five hundred dollars a week to star in *The Sheik*, a film to be made by the Famous Players Lasky Corporation. The offer also proposed other films to follow *The Sheik* at an increased fee. Rodolpho accepted and was soon at work again.

The lead in *The Sheik* was a costume role and he revelled in it. The story was from a novel by an Englishwoman, Mrs. E. M. Hull, and told of a desert chieftain who falls in love with a beautiful English girl and carries her off to his desert stronghold, there to make her his own. She resists the chieftain's desires through several reels until his ardour overwhelms her and she is brought to loving submissiveness.

This portrayal called less for great acting than an ability to make love in an uninhibited way. Rodolpho had shown his talent to do so in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, though in that film the talent had been subsidiary to his acting ability, but *The Sheik* was to depend almost completely upon it. Here was to be no polished screen lover wooing his lady according to a conventional formula of politeness, but an unsophisticated, unspoiled, untamed, animal type of love maker, a conquering primitive,

knowing no barrier but the physical ones. That Valentino, a new type of screen hero, should be the first to portray this new type of lover was a coincidence—and upon that coincidence was built everything that later gave him the right to the title: World's Greatest Lover, rocketing him from the status of film star to one of unprecedented emotional power.

It was a coincidence because Valentino, like the story, was a direct departure from contemporary film convention. He was not the patient wooer who engaged himself in an hour or more of intrigue eventually to be allowed to kiss the white hand of his maiden. Valentino was not like that. He was the simple Italian boy who hadn't acquired the technique of the city charmer. He was direct in his kissing and got a Latin's pleasure from it—and this showed itself on the screen. He was uncomplicated to the point of being utterly devoid of self-consciousness, which would have ruined the illusion completely. He was a glorious extrovert or he would never have been able to wear such colourful clothes nor look so at home in his costume roles.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse had won Valentino credit as an actor. Julio had not been a libertine or a coward, only a boy with feelings and hopes, a tragic figure in love with a woman who was unattainable, and his life had been destroyed by a world catastrophe. Valentino's human portrayal had roused public sympathy for this tragic youth. It was in the main an actor's success.

In *The Sheik* he was seen riding hard across the desert, his burnoose flying in the wind; he swept down upon the beautiful girl, pulled her up to his saddle and rode off with her. He was the hero who took what he wanted. He had no justification except physical desire. The public had never seen a heroine treated in this way before. In movies until then a man who *forced* his attention upon the leading lady had always been the villain who, in the end, had been killed off, punched on the nose, revealed as an utter out-and-outer, or otherwise punished for his actions. But here was brute force winning the reward of true love. Moreover, the heroine liked it, for she married him in the end. Valentino in *The Sheik* was a sensation. And it was entirely an emotional success.

Yet had a fair-haired typically American actor played the role the sensation would not have attached itself in the same way to the

star. Valentino was himself a departure from screen convention, an unusual 'type' for the hero of the piece. He was the only actor who looked so obviously Latin ever to be given leading roles—and at first only because stories came along demanding someone of un-American appearance. Metro had starred him as Julio, it was true, but they had refused him an increase of salary because they could not envisage him as a leading star in the general run of films. He looked too foreign. He was right for *The Four Horsemen* but such stories were rare and so consequently was the demand for foreign-looking heroes. They could not have been expected to foresee *The Sheik*.

When Valentino turned up in this new type of role the public associated his foreign appearance, also new to them in the guise of the hero, with a daringly new and primitive type of love. They did not see that whoever had played the hero in *The Sheik* would have abducted the heroine. They only saw that Valentino, the handsome foreigner who looked so like the smooth villain of most films, abducted her, forced his love upon her and made her his slave. They went to see *The Sheik* to see this *new* type of man make this *new* kind of love. And he thrilled them.

Everywhere the film appeared women packed the cinemas. Soon Valentino had jumped to top popularity among the stars. He was so different and he presented so different an idea of a lover. It seemed that no sooner had Valentino become a star than he was the greatest among them.

The disadvantages of supremacy were manifold and not long in revealing themselves. The publicity accorded him after the success of *The Four Horsemen* had mainly concerned his appearance, his prowess as a tango dancer, and his acting. It was seldom actually harmful. The publicity resulting from *The Sheik* concerned itself with his prowess in love and centred almost entirely around sex.

In the minds of the public Valentino himself became a hot-blooded lover. This young man (who spent most of his evenings quietly with Natacha, reading and learning from her of painting, literature and music) was, according to what was being printed, the boldest, sexiest man who had ever reached the shores of America. The young Italian (from a happy farming family, who longed for a wife and children and a life of simplicity on a farm

of his own) was accepted as something of a rake. In one swift leap he had landed at the top of the list of history's legendary lovers, libertines and lechers: by comparison with him Casanova was a prude.

The newspapers raved that Valentino had introduced what they termed Sex Menace—he menaced, he kissed, he conquered. He was the new type of lover. He completely outmoded the gallant who wooed with pretty phrases and pleading eyes. He was a brutal lover who made a woman feel—well, a helpless woman. He was not just a handsome fellow with melting eyes. He was not troubled with scruples. None of the intellectual man's doubts hampered his physical aims. He set out to conquer his women and he won them by the most direct and primitive methods. In him Hollywood had imported romance a hundred times more thrilling than the home-grown variety. This foreign 'type' was not afraid to depict desire and passion frankly.

The public, unable and quite unwilling to distinguish the hero of *The Sheik* from the good-looking actor who had played the role, began also to think of Valentino as The Sheik in his personal life. Just as the fiery chieftain had taken what he wanted, had followed abduction with menace, so did Valentino, darling Rudy, approach his women in real life. He was reputed to know more about the art of making love than any man who had ever lived. He was hailed as the international aphrodisiac. He was said to be adorably handsome in a thoroughly *wicked* way. Letters from women poured in from all over the world and wherever he went he was met with hysterical acclaim and idolatrous worship. He had become a phenom.

Rodolpho was stunned and embarrassed and a little afraid, but Natacha set him a fine example. Her sets for the Nazimova film, *Salome*, had been so unorthodox as to create a critical uproar. She disregarded it completely; what they thought mattered not at all. So Rodolpho went on with his work and continued to share his leisure hours with Natacha, talking of art, singing Italian folk songs to her, and cooking spaghetti meals. The world, meanwhile, nurtured the dream that he was a wild-living seducer of women.

While *The Sheik* was causing a sensation, Rodolpho was at work on a picture entitled *Moran of the Lady Letty* at a salary of seven hundred dollars a week. Dorothy Dalton played the feminine

Valentino with Nita
Naldi in *Cobra*; Below
with Louise Lagrange
in *The Sainted Devil*





THREE LEADING LADIES-

Top left Valentino and Doris Kenyon as they appeared in *Monsieur Beaucaire*; *Top right* With Vilma Banky in *The Son of the Sheik*; *Below* with Gloria Swanson in *Beyond the Rocks*





As Juan Gallardo in *Blood and Sand*, a lusty story
of the Spanish bull-rings



A scene from *Blood and Sand*, one of the biggest successes

lead. Upon its completion he was put under contract by Famous Players Lasky Corporation at a salary of one thousand dollars a week and called upon to co-star with Gloria Swanson in *Beyond the Rocks*.

This choice of leading lady was in itself a tribute to Valentino's supremacy as a romantic screen actor, for Miss Swanson was herself supreme among the women. She was one of the fabulous stars of the period and lived as people imagined a film star to live. She gave lavish parties every Saturday, when her dining-room at the mansion on Sunset Boulevard was transformed into a rose bower or an Italian restaurant or something equally surprising. The food served would have done justice to a royal banquet, and there was music and dancing and a company of celebrities richly bejewelled and magnificently attired. Each one of these banquets cost many thousands of dollars and were part of the aura of those extraordinary and glittering days of Hollywood. How curious that Rodolpho Guglielmi, son of the Italian soil, was being hailed as its king.

The word 'sheik' was now in common usage in the language to describe a man who took a masterful attitude to women. Young men who stood on small-town main streets whistling at the belles of the locality were termed 'drug-store sheiks'. Consciously and otherwise the life of a nation was being affected by this new attitude to the passionate side of man-and-woman relationships. The Valentino approach, the Great Lover's methods, the new attitude had to be taken into consideration. Man and his mate were very much aware of it.

When women were asked why they were so strongly attracted to Valentino they gave a variety of answers. "It's his eyes"—"He is a sort of finer type of caveman"—"He is a glorious god"—"It's his sex-appeal"—"He is such a beautiful animal"—"His burning glances and youthful grace."

Psychiatrists gave their views. They said:

"Most actors spoil their love scenes by their self-consciousness. They are unable to forget their audiences. Consequently, they always appear to be acting. With Valentino this is not so."

"Valentino is worshipped by women because they sense that he is the devout lover, because they know he *worships*

women. He is supremely gifted in the fine art of being a lover and this gift he frankly shares with his audiences."

"His compelling incarnations of screen heroes satisfy the repressed needs, the incoherent longings and subconscious wants of the world of women."

"There is always the suggestion, even in the climax of his passionate adoration, that no *one* woman could hold him for ever. Thus Valentino fascinates his screen admirers."

But the young man who had so overwhelmed the emotions of the world of women was himself hopelessly infatuated with the exotic Natacha Rambova, and day by day she was moulding him to be a man of her own tastes. Indeed, he was now beginning to think of his acting as an art and not just something he had stumbled into when his hopes of working on the land had faded and his attempts to be a man of business had been frustrated. Tutored to her viewpoint he began to see film acting as an art in whose every aspect it was important for him to be concerned. He began to explore behind the scenes. He became interested in the administrative, the technical and the artistic background to the production of his films.

The next subject proposed to him was *Blood and Sand*, a story of tremendous dramatic power from a novel by the author of *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, Vicente Ibanez.

Its central character is a young Spaniard who wins fame as a matador and marries his sweetheart, only to fall under the spell of an aristocratic woman who ruins his life completely. Having satiated herself in the full-bloodedness of his passion as a lover, she tires of him and finds diversion in a successor. But the proud young matador can neither rid his mind of her, nor bring himself to return in repentance to his loving wife. This torment of mind plays havoc with his skill as a bull fighter and in due time he is gored in the arena, dying in the arms of his true love. No one more than Valentino could have better portrayed the handsome young matador, fiercely proud, beset by national class divisions which make his rejection by a woman of importance all the more humiliating, his actions—and his love-making—dictated by instincts of primitive simplicity. It was an ideal choice of subject and one which would allow the Lover to act as well as the Actor to love.

For the first time, however, Rodolpho countered the offer of a film subject with certain artistic conditions of his own. He wanted the film to be made in Spain and a director of his choice to direct it, George Fitzmaurice. Both requests were extremely logical and revealed how thorough Natacha's process of culturing Rodolpho was being. *Blood and Sand* was a subject which might very well fail or succeed by the degree of atmosphere it could evoke and where else but in Spain, the land of its setting, could the right atmosphere be captured to the full? George Fitzmaurice was a director Natacha admired greatly and his work was in accord with that admiration. But the studio was not prepared to meet either proposal and there was disagreement. Rodolpho was annoyed and though he subsequently worked magnificently on the picture and gave what might well be his finest all-round performance the company's refusal (for which they had good reasons) rankled and he did not forget it.

By this time Rodolpho's reputation among his colleagues in film business was enviably high. He was liked by the technicians and floor workers for the sincerity he showed in his work, and their respect for him was as one craftsman for another. He was modest and charming and courteous to all and those who knew him could not think of him in the same terms as his bewitched public. With the money he was earning he began returning the many kindnesses shown him during the period of struggle preceding success. His pastimes were homely, buying old cars and tinkering with them and gathering a curious assortment of pets. He had always been attached to dogs and now had several, but his pets also included snakes and a lion cub. Having no really convenient place to keep his livestock he sent many of the pets to Natacha, even the lion cub—which she kept in her bathroom. As for being a notorious woman chaser, he was in fact entirely devoted to the beautiful Natacha and they were planning to marry as soon as he was legally free from Jean Acker, for until then neither party of that marriage had troubled to file a divorce petition.

With the aim of marriage to Natacha in mind he took a house in Hollywood on Whitely Heights and began preparing it with her guidance for the day when he would bring her there as his wife. Natacha's influence was strikingly evident when the house and its furnishings were complete. There were oddly shaped windows,

black velvet carpets and couches, and here and there a bizarre splash of colour in the form of a painting of the most modern school. The dining-room was entirely in black and red lacquer. With such surroundings Natacha would blend superbly, for she was tall and stately and dressed in simple, severe elegance. The whole scheme of decoration reflected her personality, though the youthful exuberance, the warm homeliness, the boyish informality of Rodolpho would never harmonize with such effects. Wide hearths, roaring fires, large shabby armchairs with a tray of old pipes to hand—these would have helped to form his ideal setting. But with Natacha there he would be happy—happy to be a part of her world.

Chapter Eight

ON 4th March, 1922, Jean Acker obtained a divorce from Rodolpho but according to the laws of the United States neither party could marry again until a year had elapsed. Rodolpho was very impatient of this technicality which forbade his marrying Natacha for a whole year. In early May *Blood and Sand* was completed and he found himself with time on his hands before work would begin on a new picture.

Deeply in love with Natacha, spending his leisure hours in her company and depending more and more upon her companionship, he thought it absurd that he should not be permitted to marry. Furthermore, their home on Whitely Heights was ready and they were both free from the studios. When he inquired if there had been other marriages involving people whose decrees had not become absolute he was told that there had been many. These couples, including several celebrated persons, had merely crossed the border into Mexico to marry before the year had elapsed. This was welcome news to him. It meant that Natacha could become his wife without delay by means of a ceremony in Mexico. Overjoyed, he asked her to prepare for the journey.

Into his fast touring car they piled light luggage for the trip. Douglass Gerrard, an English actor and close friend, agreed to act as one witness, and then they drove the one hundred and fifty miles from Hollywood to Palm Springs to collect another friend, Dr. White, as a second witness. All was now complete: bride and groom, two witnesses, the ring and money to pay for the ceremony. The party was in a gay mood as the powerful car sped south along the scorched and dusty roads to Mexico, no member of it happier than Rodolpho travelling towards the fulfilment of his most cherished dream.

The marriage took place in Tia Juana on 13th May in the house of the mayor. Natacha Rambova became Mrs. Rudolph Valentino, while a string orchestra played on the veranda and the civic band played in the yard.

The town felt honoured. Valentino, the Screen's Greatest Lover, was being married in Tia Juana. The mayor declared a day of festival and there was music and dancing and feasting throughout the whole afternoon and well into the night. The wedding breakfast continued until seven in the evening, a feast in which every select Mexican dish was represented and much wine was drunk. Late that night the wedding group left the little town with sounds of merriment and laughter ringing in their ears. The mayor and the chief of police accompanied them as far as the border and there wished the Valentinos a long life of happiness together. Flushed and very happy they crossed into the United States where another body of police awaited them—to arrest Valentino!

Rodolpho was charged with bigamy and escorted to Los Angeles jail where he was confined pending trial. His bail was set at 10,000 dollars.

It was the time of the election of civil officials in Los Angeles and the men in power had wanted to demonstrate by some such *coup* the efficient and 'impartial' justice of which they were capable. They made Valentino their pawn because to do so meant bathing their action in country-wide publicity, an election trick they considered worth thousands of votes. Valentino in jail on a charge of breaking a moral law was a prize exhibit of the thoroughness with which the present officials were prepared to 'clean up' the city. It was sheer political hokum, for the administration had turned a blind eye to previous offenders of this law; they had pounced on Rodolpho because he had made his trip across the border at a time coinciding with the administration's bid for re-election.

Rodolpho could not raise the sum of his bail. He possessed very little ready money and was in fact considerably in debt. He had been using much of his salary to buy and equip the new home he had planned to share with Natacha. Anything left over had been spent without stint on old cars, odd pets and various luxuries. He had got plenty to show for the money he had spent but, as ever, he had been unable to save. His Hollywood friends could not raise the sum, for they were in much the same position and also lived extravagantly. It looked as though the bridegroom would

languish in jail, the victim of a ruthless political stunt until the matter could be decided in open court.

Meanwhile, newspaper reporters began their seige of the county jail intent upon missing no development in what was regarded as the scandal of the year. Valentino's 'marriage' in itself was front page, but this new twist to it was the stuff of special editions—the Screen's Greatest Lover, the Prince of Sex Appeal, the King of Romance on a bigamy charge. Nothing must be missed. The public must be served.

In the gloom of the county jail Rodolpho was grief stricken. Snatched from his beloved at the moment of their greatest happiness, the most precious and intimate climax of his life suddenly stolen from him and smeared in the most spiteful and audacious forms of publicity—he felt stupefied. He didn't understand it. Reporters fired questions at him which were so intimately personal that he was hurt and shocked by them. Never had he looked more haggard or unhappy. He lost all calm, stormed up and down the cell in a rage, cursing the press and officialdom, and then sank back into a tormented silence. Utterly distraught and bewildered he was quite unable at this moment to comprehend that the thing which had shattered all the wonder of his wedding day and had changed sublime content into a fantastic nightmare was a cheap piece of vote-catching hinged upon his celebrity.

Natacha understood this. Characteristically, she treated the affair with cold contempt. It was a publicity stunt on the part of the administration and she was not going to be used as a pawn. She wanted Rodolpho released—but meanwhile she withdrew from the fuss.

Details of the arrest reached the ears of Thomas Meighan, a man who hardly knew Valentino personally. Without delay Meighan went to his bank, withdrew ten thousand dollars and presented the bail. Rodolpho was released. He returned to Hollywood to await the trial. Natacha was there to comfort, console and advise him, seeking to raise his spirit above the vulgar clamour brought upon them to further the ends of a group of politicians seeking re-election.

But the ordeal had hardly begun.

All the machinery of international publicity had been assembled at the Los Angeles court-room when the case came up

for examination. Dozens of reporters were present to spread the story of the dilemma of the screen's most idolized man. The Great Lover had made a mistake—a mistake in love, in that all-powerful emotion which had brought him the adoration of millions.

Hollywood reporters really let themselves go. Even though they were well acquainted with big-time scandal, this one dwarfed them all. That same court-room had been the scene of many sensational legal battles. It had seen Gloria Swanson, sitting like an exotic Madonna and clad in a severe black gown, receive more than one divorce. Mabel Normand had fainted there while her chauffeur was being tried for the murder of Courtland Dines. In that room, too, a judge had once told Barbara La Marr that she was too beautiful to be good. Charlie Chaplin's private life had become public property there. Texas Guinan, Jean Acker, Nazimova had all been cross-examined there and the Pickford-Fairbanks abduction case had been another exciting episode played out on that floor. A more amusing one was the case of Mary Miles Minter in which the district attorney had held aloft certain of her silk fripperies and a handkerchief while pressmen crowded round to photograph them. The trial there of Pat Kelly, who had killed the song-and-dance-man, Ray Raymond, for the love of Dorothy MacKaye, had given the world the headline: "Movie Idol Confesses Death Beating". Now Valentino, the greatest of them all, stood on trial.

When judgment came it was disturbingly simple—on the surface. The charge of bigamy was dismissed on the condition that Rodolpho and Natacha lived separately until they could be married under the laws of the United States.

But for Rodolpho it was the harshest possible of judgments. He had been impatient to wait even days to be able to call Natacha his own; now twelve months were put between him and his dream, twelve months as unpredictable as fate. He felt crushed and bitter. Once again his celebrity had played havoc with his personal contentment. This time it had dealt a heavy blow. He was not in the least worried about what the publicity might do to his popularity; his only concern was the effect it might have on his romance. Happiness, more precious to him than material success, seemed as elusive as a flame. He left the court-room a single man—



'The Young Rajah—A scene from *The Young Rajah*, one of the least successful of the pictures Valentino made after he had achieved fame



Wykham London

Rudolph Valentino in 1923

and the whole world knew that he could never be happy until Natacha was his wife.

Natacha left Hollywood. The powers had commanded that they should live apart. Very well, she would satisfy them by putting three thousand miles between herself and the man she 'married' in Mexico.

She joined her parents at the Biltmore Hotel in New York, but finding no peace there from the clamour of newspaper reporters she moved with the Hudnuts to Foxlair, their country estate in the Adirondacks. There she spent her days in quietude with books and paintings, retreating completely into realms of beauty which made the uproar of the world outside seem cheap and tawdry and unimportant. The more noise the sensationalists made the more they belittled themselves in the eyes of Natacha Rambova. She had seen the things which really mattered and which would be hailed as great when all this nonsense was over. Her mind held her high above the emotions of the masses.

To Rodolpho the parting was torture. The distance between them was not half so great as his loneliness. He wrote and cabled and telephoned across the continent, and grew frantic at even a day's silence between them. In an attempt to drive out his misery he threw himself into work, hoping to gain relief from the pain in his heart. But in that sphere, too, he met with difficulties and disappointments.

Since the signing of the contract with Famous Players Lasky Corporation he had achieved some influence in the production of his films. His word was not final, but he had been listened to and on certain minor points his advice had been acted upon. On matters of more importance his requests had been flatly turned down. This had occurred at the beginning of *Blood and Sand* when his request for a particular director and a Spanish location had been blankly refused, and it had happened again on subsequent occasions. Now a complexity arose over his next subject.

June Mathis brought a story called *The Young Rajah* to him in script form. She explained that she had prepared the scenario and wished to direct him in its filming. All Rodolpho had to do was to present the script to his employers as the subject he had chosen as his next film. Rodolpho did not like the subject and instinctively knew that it was not suited to him. But June Mathis had tremend-

ous faith in it and he had a special reason to be grateful to her. She was the woman who had pledged her reputation on his performance in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. So out of gratitude to her he loyally agreed to present *The Young Rajah* to his studio as the script he had decided upon.

The studio strongly opposed the subject and pointed out that in any case it was not his duty to choose his subjects. Rodolpho insisted; it had become a matter of principle now. Eventually the studio relented and *The Young Rajah* went on the floor under June Mathis's supervision.

Rodolpho played his role—of the American college man who at first does not know of his royal Indian ancestry—to the best of his ability and never once during the filming did he reveal his lack of enthusiasm, though he sensed a very decisive failure. The production ended and the assembled film was shown to the studio chiefs. It was a poor film. It was a blow to his prestige and a setback in his fight for independent choice, for the studio executives at once took the line: "So this is what happens when you choose your own roles." They blamed him and he did not defend himself. He preferred to remember that afternoon in New York when he first met June Mathis, the woman who had fought so many battles to make him her Julio. He had been a stranger then and she had opened the door.

The outcome of this was that Famous Players Lasky insisted upon absolute right to decide what films Valentino made in the future. They asked that he sign an agreement to this effect. Rodolpho, true to the teachings of the absent Natacha, countered this demand with an ultimatum of his own. He would choose his film subjects in future.

The company pointed out that he had elected to play *The Young Rajah* and that the film was a failure. Rodolpho refused to alter his challenge and relations with the studio rapidly grew worse.

His employers said that if he persisted in his stand drastic action would be taken. If he refused to play in the films they selected he would not be allowed to act at all. The contract he had signed with them, they reminded him, gave them authority to suspend him and, during the period of suspension, to prevent him from appearing in any film or on any stage as an actor.

Rodolpho ignored this ultimatum and kept to his own terms. The studio then announced that it had decided to suspend him forthwith.

A legal battle of extreme complexity now began with Famous Players Lasky—and Valentino prepared to leave Hollywood. Though the suspension might cause a host of disagreeable problems there was one bright patch amid the gloom. He was free to travel east to see Natacha.

Rodolpho started his journey to New York on 1st October, 1922, and travelled incognito. Journeying to his beloved, he did not want to be encumbered with the fanfare and notoriety which went with every journey Valentino made. He wore dark glasses, a false beard and carried a set of golf clubs. In this strange apparel he arrived at Foxlair—under a legal cloud, his career taken from him, tremendously in debt, and with no immediate prospects of earning money. Moreover, he could not stay under the same roof as Natacha. He would have to establish a separate residence or else jeopardize his marriage plans. On top of this he had also to meet the cost of his lawsuit which ran at two thousand five hundred dollars a week!

He borrowed more money. Friends told him that he was crazy to allow this state of affairs to continue. Why not return to Hollywood and make the films the company chose for him? Surely, they argued, the high salary they were willing to pay him was something to be considered. What had happened to him to make him behave with such obstinacy? Who was behind it all?

Natacha had taught Rodolpho his worth. She would never have allowed her principles to be defiled, and so neither would he. True to her teachings he refused to alter one clause of the agreement for which he was fighting.

Serious though his position undoubtedly was Rodolpho's greatest ally was the public. His popularity had reached most extraordinary heights. *Blood and Sand* had been released and was proving a fortune-maker wherever it was shown, for once more Valentino's uninhibited performance had transformed a film with a passionate and colourful theme into an entertainment capable of throwing his admirers into ecstasy. The tragic love story of the ill-fated matador had become inseparably entwined in the public view with the real-life drama of the Screen's Greatest Lover. Was

not Rudy also suffering the pains of love? The public had grown so accustomed to finding their hero in the headlines that they hung upon the next development as though it were an episode in a serial story. What would the amazing Rudy do next? Meanwhile, they flocked to see him in *Blood and Sand*.

In one scene in this film he had had to express a sudden revulsion of feeling against the lure of a cabaret girl, and he had flung her from him. This action was seized upon as being 'sheikish' and many women saw the film repeatedly in order to thrill anew to this particular exhibition of masculine vehemence.

Lonely women, and the world was full of lonely women in those years following the first great war, went to see it to witness what they felt had been denied them. For millions of young men had died, the manhood of many countries, youngsters who would have made it all so different for the legions of the lonely who found in Valentino a hero from whom to draw enchantment even if of a synthetic kind.

Valentino's handsome features, his charm, his masterful approach and infinite tenderness when he held a woman in his arms, won him to them. They had known love only in dreams and he gave substance to those dreams. When they closed their eyes it was Rudy's face they saw, the sombre eyes and passionate lips of Valentino and his strong, bronzed arms encircled them. Going back to his films again and again was like dreaming a dream from which one need never really awaken. They substituted themselves for the heroine. Rudy was so much more than just their favourite film star. He was their lover, their dream love—and these women had only dreams.

Rodolpho could not now appear in public without being mobbed by women. If they got sufficiently close to him they snatched his hat, wrenched off buttons and tore the links from the cuffs of his shirt. Thousands of women wrote him letters. His daily post was huge. Two secretaries were employed full time dealing with it. These letters, which sometimes enclosed a photograph of the sender, often revealed the possessive nature of the adoration in which he was held. Many of the letters were written in the most intimate terms. One thousand five hundred photographs of Valentino were dispatched weekly in answer to requests from all over the world. Clubs were formed in the various

countries where his films were shown. Their members were active in support of him, collecting every press reference, speaking only well of him and ever ready to defend his name.

Valentino had become the king-pin of an organized, world-wide allegiance, a potent influence upon the social habits of the time, and a tremendously powerful selling force in all manner of commercial spheres.

Women's fashions continued to be influenced by the Valentino costume roles. During the national showings of *Blood and Sand* a Spanish influence predominated in all matters of feminine attire. Shawls, bandanas and colourful skirts were mass produced and nationally distributed with extravagant advertising campaigns allied to the film. With the release of *The Young Rajah* the turban motif influenced female headwear. Young men also wore Valentino styles and masculine attire became a degree more colourful. Indeed, love itself became more passionate since Valentino had set as standard the strong and forceful type of lover. The days of gentle wooing were over. The public approach to love became less inhibited and sex began to be more frankly exploited in advertising, popular journalism, novels and films.

Thus Valentino stood unique and alone, his name synonymous with the most powerful emotion of man, and the world lay at his feet—Rodolpho, meanwhile, was unhappy and facing ruin.

He was genuinely puzzled by the response of the public to his love dramas. He argued that there were Valentinos on every street corner in every Italian city and town. This was true—and had any one of them played *The Sheik* instead of Rodolpho they might have become the Screen's Greatest Lover. For Valentino had been hailed as such purely as a result of timing and public need and the fact that it had been possible to display his physical freshness in a drama whose approach to love was also new, *The Sheik*. Now there were imitators in every bar and dance hall. Movie makers, aware of public taste, were grooming other Latins as shadow lovers for the public pleasure. Soon there would be carbon copy Valentinos on the screens of every country Hollywood could reach.

But Valentino was still supreme—and very disheartened by the strange situation in which he found himself.

The world wanted more of his films, but he was prevented from

making them. His love for Natacha was everywhere known, but he was denied the happiness of making her his wife. He could have commanded an enormous salary, but he was being forced to borrow money to pay for his day-to-day needs.

It seemed to him that everything that he had ever wanted in life was laid before him—just a little way out of his reach.

Certainly, he could go back to work on terms that were not agreeable to him, but that would be shelving his pride. It would be belittling himself in Natacha's eyes, and no matter what catastrophes loomed he would never do that. She knew her ability as an artist and would never sell it cut-rate. She was completely behind him in this lawsuit and he would fall in her estimation if he gave in. While he had something the movie chiefs wanted, they would have to meet his terms to get it. That was the attitude of which Natacha approved and Rodolpho held fast to it.

The legal battle continued, its tremendous cost mounting week by week. Other expenses weighed heavily upon him, but Rodolpho still held firm. Then something came along to show that he was a big money earner in other spheres than acting.

A firm of beauty clay manufacturers sent a representative to Rodolpho with the suggestion that he and Natacha should go on a dancing tour. George Ullman, the company's representative, explained that the tour would include the larger cities of the United States and Canada. After each performance Natacha would declare that the clay was responsible for her exquisite complexion and Valentino would also say a few words in praise of it. That was all. The salary, Mr. Ullman added, would be seven thousand dollars a week plus very comfortable travelling arrangements. This was fourteen times what he had been paid to star in *The Sheik*.

They accepted. Rodolpho's contract with Famous Players did not forbid him from appearing as a dancer, only as an actor. They were powerless to prevent this dancing tour. Furthermore, it would prove to them that his name could earn vast sums quite independently of film roles.

They travelled in a luxuriously appointed rail car and many incidents during the tour demonstrated Valentino's tremendous drawing power. For instance, in Nebraska it was thought that a blizzard sweeping the countryside would keep the public at home

but, in fact, hundreds were turned away from the performance. In Wichitaw, Kansas, a public holiday was declared and in many towns the schools were closed for the day of the Valentinos' visit so that the children should see the great screen personality. He won the hearts of the people of Montreal by addressing them in French as well as in English, both languages being equally represented there. And during the tour Rodolpho was able to make his beloved Natacha his wife.

They were married at Crown Point, Indiana, on 13th May, 1923, exactly a year to the day later than that ill-fated ceremony in Tia Juana.

Chapter Nine

AFTER seventeen weeks of continuous travel the Valentinos returned to New York. They had earned a lot of money but they were tired. Rodolpho's affairs were still in a maze of difficulties and his debts now stood at fifty thousand dollars. And the legal battle went on.

George Ullman, who had organized the dancing tour and was now a close friend of the Valentinos, felt that Rodolpho was being badly advised. Rodolpho agreed with this view and offered Ullman the position as his business manager. Ullman, a married man with a family, hesitated; Rodolpho's affairs were so complex, his debts so colossal and the legal situation so unsatisfactory. Eventually, however, he accepted and began rearranging the affairs.

During the dancing tour Rodolpho had given an option of a contract to J. D. Williams, who was forming a new film organization. This gave Williams first right to negotiate for Valentino's services as soon as the lawsuit with Famous Players should be settled, though in point of fact an early settlement was hardly foreseeable.

The case was not going well for Rodolpho. His attorney had created a bad impression in court by complaining about the smallness of the dressing-room Famous Players had allotted Valentino. This was seized upon by the company's attorney to suggest that the star was temperamental and made hysterical demands. The manœuvre successfully clouded the points for which Rodolpho was really fighting. Regarding the moment as propitious for a settlement Famous Players made Rodolpho an offer. They were willing to pay him seven thousand five hundred dollars a week to make films as they directed. It was a salary far in excess of anything he had earned in film business before.

Rodolpho, who was in court with Natacha, refused the company's offer. Natacha smiled encouragement. Again he made his stand clear: he would not make another film unless he was given absolute control of the production, including choice of story

and director and final word concerning every set to be used in the film. Having stated his terms he left the court-room, made his way through the clamouring crowds of fans, with Natacha on his arm, her calm voice expressing approval.

Never before had the change she had wrought in him been so clearly demonstrated. Until she entered his life he had been eager to work in any film; he had meekly gone on working after being refused an increase on a three-hundred-and-fifty-dollar-a-week salary at a time when *The Four Horsemen* was proving his ability as an actor. He had not thought of his work in artistic terms then; he had been grateful for a role in any film. Now he was refusing seven thousand five hundred dollars a week, regarding himself as an artist, and insisting that he dictate what films he made and the manner of their production.

The film chiefs pointed to Natacha—that cold, indomitable woman, fascinating and at the same time intimidating, exotically beautiful but with the hard logic of super-egotism. Valentino, they said, was completely in her power. So vast a change in the outlook of a man could not have come about without some very powerful influence being brought to bear upon him. It was not Valentino they were fighting; it was Natacha Rambova. Moreover, she knew precisely what he was worth and she would not retreat an inch. Her hold over him was stronger, they knew, than anything that existed on paper between him and a film company.

The weeks of protracted litigation continued. Offers were made and refused. Rodolpho's position was unmistakably clear and he would not budge an inch. No compromise was possible. The public was still his most powerful ally. Public acclaim for his films, public clamour for more of them, was the measure of his worth. Rodolpho knew it. Natacha knew it. The company knew it. Someone would have to unbend—but it would not be Valentino.

Thus his career was temporarily at an end. No understanding could be reached with the company and there was nothing more he could do at the moment to earn money. Both he and Natacha were tired after the long and arduous dancing tour and their minds were dulled by endless litigation. It seemed a time to take a rest, a belated honeymoon, and so they put aside all thoughts of mounting debts and began to plan a trip to Europe.

Natacha's aunt, Mrs. Werner, with whom she had stayed in New York during part of the period she had been forced to live apart from Rodolpho, was to be included in the party. She would travel with them as far as Cherbourg and from there travel independently through France to the Riviera. Rodolpho and Natacha would disembark at Southampton for a London visit, fly from London to Paris and then motor south to join Mrs. Werner at the Château Juan Les Pins, the magnificent home of Natacha's parents.

Her stepfather, Richard Hudnut, had bought this *château* near Nice before the First World War from a Russian prince who had lost his money at the gaming tables of Monte Carlo. It was, at the time he purchased it, decorated throughout in Moorish style, which the Hudnuts disliked, but before they had the opportunity to change it the war began and they lent their stately home to the French Government for use as a military hospital. After the war they had at once set about transforming the whole interior, a task which took them five years. They favoured the period of Louis XVI and practically all the furniture and furnishings of the new scheme were genuine relics of that period. Added to them were priceless treasures which the millionaire and his wife purchased during their wanderings in Europe. Glowing descriptions of the splendour of the *château* had crossed the Atlantic from Mrs. Hudnut and Natacha was eager to see it.

After a period of complete rest at the Château Juan Les Pins Rodolpho and Natacha and Mrs. Werner would motor in Italy. The main object of this part of the trip was to enable Rodolpho to reunite with his brother, Alberto, and sister, Maria. He had also a strong desire to see again that simple farm-house in which he had been born and to wander as he had done during childhood about the dusty cobbled lanes of Castellaneta. He had long nurtured a nostalgia for his native land.

Having planned their itinerary they booked passages on the *Aquitania* and for three days before it was due to sail Rodolpho was almost too excited to eat or sleep. He could hardly believe it true that this particular dream was being fulfilled. To be recrossing the ocean to the world of his boyhood with a beautiful wife by his side was something before which all his problems faded into insignificance. Many times he had dared to hope for it, even during the

months of patient wooing of Natacha. Now it was becoming a reality.

Invitations poured in from friends asking them to farewell parties and dinners but Rodolpho declined them all. Countless requests for interviews arrived from newspaper columnists anxious to obtain the story of their trip, and even these were refused. He was too excited to behave naturally and desired only to plan his departure quietly and carefully.

The day of sailing arrived and they went down to the quay, that same quayside where ten years earlier he had first set foot on American soil as a homeless immigrant with hopes of some sort of work on the land. He had been so friendless then, unknown to a single American. Now he and Natacha boarded the liner amid a welter of fuss and excitement. Hundreds of reporters and cameramen were there to cover the departure and many friends had come to say farewell. Crowding the quayside were the legions of Valentino fans.

Together with Mrs. Werner, the Valentinos stood on deck until New York had disappeared beyond the skyline. Then, happy and excited and genuinely moved by the sincerity of the hundreds of well-wishers, they went below to their suite. Here was still more evidence of the friendship and affection he had won in America. The suite was crowded with flowers, baskets of fruit and other gifts and littered with letters and telegrams, the majority of them from people he did not know—'unseen friends' as he had come to call his fans. For the whole of that day the three travellers stayed in their suite reading these messages of goodwill.

The first excitement over, Rodolpho and Natacha realized how very tired they were. They felt an urgent need to relax, to avoid being drawn into contact with people. For a while Rodolpho wanted to escape from the role of Valentino and with Natacha quietly to enjoy the realization of this dream. They decided, therefore, to remain as far as possible out of sight for the rest of the voyage and to arrange for all meals to be sent into their suite.

Yet, despite his fatigue, Rodolpho was as restless and excited as a schoolboy on a picnic. He began to plan a programme for London which would take in all the 'sights'—the Tower, Buckingham Palace, Windsor Castle, Westminster Abbey and so forth. He would also equip himself with a London-tailored wardrobe, an

ambition he had long had in view. Infected by his exuberance Natacha began to arrange the Paris part of the holiday with as much enthusiasm, and devoted a considerable amount of it to shopping for clothes. They were happy in the privacy of this suite which afforded them an atmosphere of away-from-it-all restfulness they had never before known together.

Walking on the deck one morning they met George Arliss, the distinguished British actor, and his wife. Arliss had completed a long stage engagement in a successful New York play and was returning to England to relax. That same evening they dined together in the Valentinos' suite. In the course of the evening Rodolpho told his guests that apart from an occasional stroll on deck they intended to keep from view and to the privacy of their suite during the voyage. Arliss admitted that he and his wife had the same idea. It was a rare chance to relax, though, of course, it would not make them popular aboard.

As they had expected Valentino was criticized for keeping so much to himself. He and Natacha were accused of being aloof and upstage. A benefit concert was organized and Valentino was asked to dance. Determined that nothing should interfere with his plan, he declined the invitation and gave a sum of money to ship's charities instead. This did not appease the woman organizer of the benefit concert who publicly declared that she thought it "outrageous" that he should refuse to appear when "he owed so much to the public". Rodolpho was disturbed by this trouble but Natacha advised him to rise above it, and his resolve was strengthened when he heard that George Arliss had donated money rather than perform and had been similarly criticized. For the rest of the journey the Valentinos kept more and more to themselves. At Cherbourg they took farewell of Mrs. Werner and made ready for their own disembarkation at Southampton.

There was a small gathering at Southampton to greet him—reporters and 'unseen friends'—and he noticed some disappointment on the part of members of the press when they noted the modest amount of luggage he had brought. Publicity, it seemed, had credited him with possessing a fabulous quantity of suits and other garments so that the pressmen had expected him to arrive with mountains of luggage. He explained to the reporters that he intended buying some suits in London.

They reached London at midnight in pouring rain. Because of the weather and the late hour they had expected to be met only by Rodolpho's secretary who had travelled ahead to arrange their stay. They were astonished to find more than a thousand people at the station, and Rodolpho had feelings of pride and gratitude when he was told that they had been waiting there in the rain for hours and that many would have trouble getting home as most of the public transport stopped at midnight. He remained a long time at the station signing autographs while Natacha waited in a car. They then drove to the Carlton Hotel where, his secretary informed him, they had 'the suite'.

Rodolpho's excitement knew no bounds. He wanted to do everything—shopping, 'the sights', the theatres, the home of Dickens—but for the first morning he had to forget about them and attend to the demands of celebrity. There were no less than forty-five reporters waiting to interview him. Furthermore, his remark at Southampton about his intention to buy English clothes had appeared in the morning newspapers with the result that a crowd of tailors' representatives also awaited his appearance. His secretary produced a mountain of fan-mail and a great quantity of autograph books which had been sent to the hotel for his signature. It was late afternoon before Natacha and he set out sightseeing.

Nevertheless, he was happy. He was used to the interest of the American public but to find such warmth and enthusiasm in a country he had never before seen gave him a new thrill and made him realize what it meant to be a public figure on an international scale.

That evening they dined quietly at the Carlton and retired immediately to their rooms where Rodolpho was able to have a business discussion with his secretary and learn for the first time what this princely accommodation was costing. The figure shocked him. The secretary pointed out that he was sleeping in a bed which had been slept in by Pershing, Foch, the King and Queen of the Belgians, Clemenceau, Briand, Count Sforza, Admiral Sims, Paderewski, the Maharajah of Bikaner, the Count and Countess Ishii and many others of note during their respective sojourns in town. They were probably not fifty thousand dollars in

debt at the time, Rodolpho reflected. But it was worth it. They were, as Natacha put it, paying for history.

The next morning brought forty-five reporters to their suite again, for it transpired that his secretary had fixed upon that number as the maximum daily intake of pressmen. There was also a huge new delivery of fan-mail and another batch of autograph books to sign. Once more it was late afternoon before he was free to see the town with his wife.

But their stay in London was as wonderful as Rodolpho had anticipated it would be. Various members of the wealthy Guinness family entertained them and they were invited out by George Arliss to dinners and theatres. Rodolpho found time to see tailors and order the clothes he wanted. Natacha, a fancier of Pekinese dogs, suggested that they reserve one afternoon for a visit to the kennels of Mrs. Ashton Cross, breeder of these dogs, in Surrey.

Never had Rodolpho seen her so excited as when they drove into the grounds of this establishment. On the lawn were dozens of Pekinese, feathered old champions as well as little woolly bundles crawling on furry stomachs. Never before had he seen his stately Natacha behave in a manner so warmly human as when she petted and fondled them oblivious of everyone. They left the kennels with three of the fluffy infants in Natacha's lap.

Another excursion into the English countryside that delighted Rodolpho was a visit to Natacha's school at Epsom. The school was on holiday and so they wandered in the grounds, Natacha recounting episodes of her life there. But he could not picture her in childhood: she seemed too modelled as a woman, a masterpiece created rather than evolved.

The Valentinos left London for France, flying off from Croydon on a day of sullen greyness. The flight itself was an adventure, since the great majority of Channel travellers still preferred the packet sea run. Crossing in a plane all struts and flaps was, in the main, agreed to in order to appease Rodolpho's boyish curiosity concerning this advanced method of travel which to most people still seemed impossible.

Paris held an even greater welcome. There was no opportunity here to spend a quiet evening in their hotel, to rest or prepare for the surge of press interviewers on the morrow. Four hundred people had waited to greet him when he stepped from the plane,

and a Monsieur Hebertot, director of the Theatre de Champs Elysées, had his car at the aerodrome to whisk them away to the Hotel Plaza Athenée where again they were to be luxuriously accommodated. There was time only for a short rest before they were escorted to a brilliant dinner arranged in their honour and attended by newspaper editors, authors, important actors and other celebrities.

Paris was another whirl of interviews, entertainments, sight-seeing and shopping, and M. Hebertot was always there to arrange some new adventure. They admired the French journalists for the intelligence of their questions and their courteous manners. Rodolpho had many reasons to despise certain types of American reporters, the kind who pried into his most intimate life and fabricated what they could not factually learn. They had even asked him how he 'treated' his wife. He had an utter contempt for writers who appeared obsessed with curiosity concerning his simplest tastes—in neckties, hair lotion and laxatives! Here, in France, the press treated him as a human personality, credited him with the intelligence of one, and as someone who devoted some thought to serious subjects.

At one press interview Rodolpho also recruited a young reporter to the ranks of the film world. Natacha and he were together when Andre Daven, representing *Bonsoir*, arrived at their suite to interview him. As the youngster entered Rodolpho and his wife exchanged a glance—the boy was astoundingly handsome. In the course of the interview Rodolpho suggested to Daven that he had the essentials to bring him success as a screen star, but the reporter was not at first enthusiastic. Rodolpho was insistent and by the time the interview ended he had promised the boy a role in the next picture he made and to arrange for him to travel to America.

Shopping was done in earnest in Paris. Rodolpho had set his mind on purchasing two cars, an open tourer for himself and a closed saloon for Natacha. Together they inspected the models of seventeen different manufacturers before deciding on Voisin. Even this firm did not have exactly what they wanted, but provided an open tourer for their use while in France and until the two of their own specification were ready. They placed an order for the two cars, directing that they must be finished in a colour

scheme of steel grey coachwork and vivid red leather upholstery.

Natacha turned her attention to clothes and this was even more difficult. It was not just a question of adorning a beautiful woman, but of blending the couturier's art with a striking personality. Natacha could not wear pastel shades with oddments of flowers here and there. Anything she wore had to be definite, or it faded against her beauty. She looked best in violent colours—flaring scarlets, strong blues, emphatic greens, loud yellows, blazoning purples. If she did not have these colours then dead black or glaring white were alternatives, and the cut of the dress had to be the simplest that could be achieved. It took an artist to dress Natacha and she found one in Monsieur Poiret, a couturier who at once understood what she required. He created clothes that brought murmurs of delight from her. Rodolpho accompanied his wife when she tried on these creations for the first time and she showed him the subtle effects that had been achieved by an exquisite simplicity of line.

Monsieur Hebertot, determined that no dull moment should spoil their stay, told the Valentinos that he had rented a villa at Deauville for the season and that it was a particularly brilliant season this year. He invited them to join him for a few days and they accepted the invitation with pleasure, for this was an opportunity for Natacha to display her new clothes.

They set out in the open tourer with a chauffeur-driven saloon car loaded with luggage following close behind. M. Hebertot brought up the rear in his own closed car. Then it began to rain.

For a time Natacha did not complain, although one of her new dresses was being soaked. At last she could bear this no longer and asked Rodolpho to stop. He did so and she got out of the tourer and went into the saloon car, squeezing in among the baggage. Rodolpho drove on in the tourer, exposed to the rain. Before many more miles had been covered there was another change round. M. Hebertot caught up with the leading cars and beckoned to them to stop. They did so. M. Hebertot then joined Rodolpho in the tourer while Natacha transferred from the luggage-piled saloon into M. Hebertot's closed car which she drove for the rest of the journey. The discomforts of the day were brought to a climax on reaching the villa, which they had supposed would be warm and welcoming and staffed by willing servants. It was empty,



THE SAINTED DEVIL—Two scenes from the production.
With Valentino *above* is leading lady Helena D'Algy





The marriage scene from *The Sainted Devil*. Helena D'Algy is the bride

cold and cheerless. There were no fires, no hot water and the telephones were not working.

The stay at Deauville was generally disappointing. It rained almost constantly. Natacha had no opportunity to wear the superb white suits she had brought with her. Rodolpho could not bathe. And at the Casino, where they finally anticipated seeing some evidence of M. Hebertot's more than usually brilliant season, they found a gathering of very obvious tourists who pestered them with inquiries and requests for autographs.

Rodolpho took numerous photographs during drives around the Normandy countryside with the expensive cameras he had brought over from America, but as he did not properly understand their intricate working the majority of his exposures did not develop. Nevertheless, they found more pleasure in the lovely countryside of Normandy than they had drawn from either London or Paris or Deauville. It was the sense of space about them, the freedom from social obligations, and as never before they felt a closeness between them. They were almost sad to leave this setting but it was necessary to return to Paris to prepare for their journey to Nice.

In Paris the indefatigable M. Hebertot presented a farewell gift to Rodolpho—a doberman, an incongruous companion to Natacha's trio of Pekinese.

On the journey to Nice the long, straight French roads, without speed limit, were an invitation to dare-devilry to Rodolpho at the wheel of his powerful car. From the moment they were clear of Paris he was intent upon showing Natacha just how fast the Voisin could travel and his prowess as a driver, and this thoughtlessness began their first serious quarrel. She told him it was stupid to travel at such speeds but like an obstinate child he persisted. What might have been a long and pleasant drive accomplished at a comfortable speed became a series of minor irritations to Natacha which set her nerves on edge and made her criticise her husband bitterly. On one occasion he nearly drove the car over a precipice and only by swerving and braking violently did he save them. Natacha shrieked—and for the rest of the journey they were silent.

Chapter Ten

THE stay at Nice was a happy period—a family reunion. Natacha's mother, her stepfather and her aunt and the two lovers under happier conditions than they had known in more than a year, formed a cheerful domestic gathering.

Their problems were now far away and they felt completely free to do just as they pleased. They spent their day lazily wandering about the beautiful grounds of the *château* or discussing the arrangements of the priceless Louis XVI furniture with which the great house was entirely furnished. The long hot days, the absolute ease of them, cleared their minds and rested their bodies.

In the evenings there were parties in Nice, not the glittering affairs of Hollywood where everyone was either a star or hopefully intent upon becoming one, but gatherings of friends concerned only with having a quietly happy time. Natacha and Rodolpho thoroughly enjoyed themselves and she would bring young friends to him and ask him to dance with them. Sometimes there would be revelry and dancing all night in some splendid restaurant on the Cote d'Azur and then breakfast of ham and eggs at a tiny wayside café. There were long drives in crowded cars, everyone laughing, everyone gay, no thoughts of work or finance. It was complete escape.

But there were other things to be done, other places to be visited, and the Voisin tourer was brought out once more in readiness for the long drive through Italy.

For Rodolpho this promised to be the most exciting part of the European tour because he was to meet his brother and sister again. Natacha's aunt, who was to accompany them, decided on what was essential to the trip and left as much room as possible in the car for the many things they intended to buy in Italy.

They set out happily. Rodolpho, however, again drove at such speeds that he distressed Natacha, and it was not just the high speeds which caused her discomfort. The Italian Government had been so impoverished by the war that it had been unable to

spend money on the upkeep of roads. People living along the main routes had broken stones and thrown them on to the road surfaces for the traffic to grind in.

Rodolpho's car bounced and swayed over these rough surfaces and the recklessness with which he drove threw the two women from side to side, while Natacha pleaded with him to go more cautiously. But he could not understand their fears with a driver so dexterous as himself at the wheel and continued to let the powerful car fly along at such a rate that the dust rose in clouds and made everyone cough. At Genoa, pent up with nervous strain, Natacha burst into tears and could not control herself. She cried until her body shook and racked with pain. Rodolpho was now very concerned but could not console her and she stormed at him for being so reckless. She said that he was a 'neurotic' at the wheel of a car. She retired to bed for a day, refusing to go on.

In the morning she agreed to continue the journey only after her husband had pleaded with her and had promised in future to drive with more care. They drove on to Milan and on this part of the trip he was more considerate.

Rodolpho was reunited with his sister in Milan. The little Maria with whom he had played as a child had grown into a beautiful young woman, with features very similar to Rodolpho's own—the same flashing teeth, the same dark, broody eyes, and raven hair the colour of his. She greeted him with tears streaming down her cheeks and for some moments neither she nor Rodolpho could speak. They just hugged one another and wept.

But Maria did not look as he had expected, for he had become used to women who were heavily made up and daringly dressed. Italy was not so advanced in such matters and Maria's clothes were plain and ordinary by American standards and she wore no make-up. She was even a little shocked when she met Natacha; she had not expected her brother's wife to use powder and rouge and kohl or to dress in clothes that were so conspicuous. In Italy, she explained, such adornments were used only by an unmentionable class of women. Natacha was amused and without delay set about changing the appearance of her sister-in-law, choosing the new clothes her brother bought for her and persuading Maria towards a restrained and effective use of cosmetics.

The days in Milan were crowded from morning until dusk

with sightseeing. Natacha was delighted to gaze again at great paintings. They renewed her determination to go on in quest of self-expression. They were a renewal of strength to her and she felt again the spirit of the artist stir deeply within her, goading her forward. Some day, she knew, it would demand release.

From Milan they went to Florence where they spent most of their time in musty book shops looking for works on national costumes of various countries and periods. They found many volumes which delighted them. Again they spent lavishly, regardless of the debt they were piling up against the earning power of the Valentino name. One particularly expensive purchase was a book on Oriental costume published in 1500. Guided by Natacha's expert eye, many of the purchases they made were real investments and would be worth much more in America than in Europe.

The next stop on the journey south was Sienna, a trove for seekers after the old and the beautiful, and amid the dusty jumble of an antique *salon* there they discovered a small copy of Holbein's 'Anne of Cleves'. It was a contemporary copy, though for the first few exciting days of possessing it they were half convinced that it was the original. They tested the worm holes to see if they were real and the test proved unquestionably that the painting was indeed very old. It turned out to be a copy, not the work of the master, but it was a rare find worth a great deal more than they had paid for it.

Travelling through these ancient cities of his native land Rodolpho realized how vastly he had changed during the ten years he had spent in America, and how different a person he would have been had he remained at home. He was constantly irritated by the slowness of service in the Italian hotels and the lack of many comforts one expected as a matter of routine in even the simplest of American establishments. Looking at the leisurely Italian way of life he saw, too, that there were not the same opportunities in this older country. He knew that if he had remained in Italy, even if it had possessed a film industry on the scale of Hollywood's, he would never have climbed to the top so rapidly, if at all. There were too many of his 'type' here, young men as dark and sleek as himself, and some with better looks, and he would have remained just another actor.

On the next lap of their journey, which was to bring them to Rome, Rodolpho forgot about his promise to Natacha to drive the car with care. He had two small accidents. Once he ran into a telegraph pole and on another occasion hit a cart. He continued to fly along the atrocious roads, bumping his passengers mercilessly and enveloping them in clouds of suffocating dust. On arrival in Rome Natacha announced flatly that she would go no farther.

Rodolpho was shocked by her decision and though he pleaded and abjectly apologized it was to no avail. She pointed out that he had made the same promise before and had broken his pledge. Now she would rest in Rome a while and after some sightseeing she would take the train back to Nice. Although this was a blow to Rodolpho, he knew that no argument would alter her mind. He accepted the decision and later felt that it was probably just as well, as the roads south of Rome were worse than those they had already travelled.

In Rome they hired an open carriage and drove around the magnificent streets and piazzas in company with Mrs. Werner and Maria. Rodolpho's sister had joined the party, having accepted an invitation from Natacha to spend a year at the Hudnuts' *château* in Nice.

They went to see the sets of *Quo Vadis* which was being filmed in Rome with Emil Jannings in the role of Nero. It was a scene of uproar and confusion, for there were at least half a dozen languages being spoken on the sets. The leading lady knew only English, Jannings knew only German, and of the two directors one spoke Italian and the other German and French. Hundreds of negroes had been brought over from Africa to play as slaves and they spoke in several dialects. Every stage direction in the vast crowd scenes was bellowed through megaphones simultaneously in several languages by a group of interpreters employed for this task, and before the directions were decided upon long discussions took place in the various tongues.

Yet, despite these handicaps, the production of *Quo Vadis* was proceeding very successfully. In these days of silent movies it mattered not at all what language an artist spoke and for a film on this epic scale the best actors were recruited from all over the world.

Once Rodolpho took Natacha for a stroll in the Colosseum

by moonlight. They found something strangely moving in this magnificent structure which loomed down upon them from a gory past. They were held by its atmosphere and in a mood of fancy they could almost hear the screams of Christians being torn to pieces by savages and starved animals. They sat there on stones that had once been spattered with blood, picturing days when this mighty arena had been the scene of so much slaughter—superbly developed gladiators fighting to the death while the citizens of Rome yelled for blood, roared for it, until it gushed from sword-hacked limbs and drained the life out of fellow humans. Natacha and Rodolpho felt a shudder pass over them as they wondered how modern audiences would have reacted to even five minutes of any one of these pagan spectacles.

The hotels in Rome were much above the standard of those of the northern Italian cities and they were able to rest comfortably during their stay in the capital. Thoroughly refreshed, Rodolpho and Mrs. Werner and Maria prepared to continue the journey. There was a sad moment at the station when Natacha boarded the Riviera train, for her decision to return this way entailed parting from her husband for the first time since their marriage. But they were happy in the knowledge that it would not be for long, and as the train sped north with Natacha, the rest of the party bumped painfully along the rocky roads to the more primitive south, towards the village of Castellaneta.

They made a stop en route at Campobasso, a small town north-east of Naples, to visit Alberto, Rodolpho's brother, and again there was a scene of delight as the two brothers greeted each other.

On the first night of their reunion the two men sat talking until dawn. They had corresponded so little that Rodolpho had much to tell his brother. On the other hand, Alberto had very little to tell because nothing much happened in the quiet contentment of his life. He had a comfortable position in the local government service, a small though very pleasant home, a wife who adored him, and a lively son. To Rodolpho it seemed that his brother had achieved a very enviable life, simple but containing everything an ordinary man expected, and much that the great Valentino longed for in his own.

Then they continued south to Castellaneta which Rodolpho found little changed. There were not many people there who had

known him as a boy and most of his relatives had moved away. His celebrity meant little to them, for there was no cinema within miles. He was entertained in the traditional manner of the country with wines and cakes and he stopped to chat with the local grocer from whom his mother had bought the family provisions. In the evening he wandered alone along narrow, cobbled streets, glancing furtively into the windows of tiny homes. But to the village he was a stranger and he realized that his life was now too far removed from simplicity to permit his feeling at home in this setting; nor could he picture Natacha bustling about the little farm-house where his mother had worked so joyfully to bring up her family.

Mrs. Werner, however, was enchanted with the house of Rodolpho's birth. She wandered around it admiring its thick white walls and shuttered windows and then she looked at Rodolpho strangely. How very curious, she thought, that a boy from so simple a country home should have been able to sway the emotions of women throughout the world.

But Rodolpho did not belong in Castellaneta any more and was relieved when the time came to leave the house and the village. So many memories hurt now. Life in America was so different, so very big, and there was no place in it for the simple joys he had known in childhood and youth. He regretted that. It made him sad, but then he remembered all he had achieved in its place—fame and a beautiful wife. And soon the car was speeding along the poor roads again, throwing up clouds of dust and startling the peasants' mules, for Rodolpho was heading north again, to be with his beloved Natacha.

In Rome there were several letters from her and these reported that developments in the legal dispute in America were favourable to them. Each new letter reaching Nice, Natacha reported, increased the hope that all would be settled soon and to their advantage. Rodolpho welcomed this news. In Castellaneta something had happened to him; he had felt an overwhelming urge to get back to the studios and a new costume role, to escape from those memories of the little farm-house and of his brother at home with his wife and son. Despite his success he had felt oddly cheated of something he could not exactly define or, perhaps, preferred not to. He had tried to cast these thoughts aside. Had not his dreams also come true, he asked himself? Was he not the

Gallant Knight who had won his Great Lady? Then he should live that dream. There was no going back.

And so he was glad to join Natacha in her sun-flooded world sweet with flowers. She was attired in the *chic* of Paris and her Pekinese frolicked around her. Yes, she was his Great Lady, the perfect partner for the role he must play.

They had intended to spend a leisurely few days at the Château Juan Les Pins before travelling slowly and easily north to Paris and then London where they would meet J. D. Williams for a business discussion, but they received a cable from Williams asking them to join him on board the *Leviathan* at Cherbourg when the liner called there on its trans-Atlantic voyage to England. They thought it strange that Williams should make this request, for he knew they were due in London soon after he would arrive there. But Williams had stated the *Leviathan* and so they concluded that he must have good reasons for doing so, important business that could not wait another day or perhaps some dramatic development in the legal dispute which made him more than anxious to begin talking terms with them.

The news was unwelcome to them but they both agreed that it would be advisable to comply with the request. Any remaining doubts were banished upon receiving a second cable from Williams which read: "If you want to please me, come to Cherbourg." They decided to change all their plans, dismiss any thought of returning to Paris, and to leave immediately by the most direct route for Cherbourg. They would have to hurry if they were to meet the liner during its brief stop at the port *en route* for Southampton.

They wired Paris instructing that their trunks, which they had stored there with the intention of picking them up on the return journey, be sent without delay to the Cherbourg docks. Rodolpho wired the Voisin company and asked them to send a driver to Nice, one who knew the roads to Cherbourg. Not only was Rodolpho tired after weeks of driving, but Natacha had insisted upon engaging a chauffeur. There were hasty farewells and soon the Voisin and its two passengers began the long journey north across France.

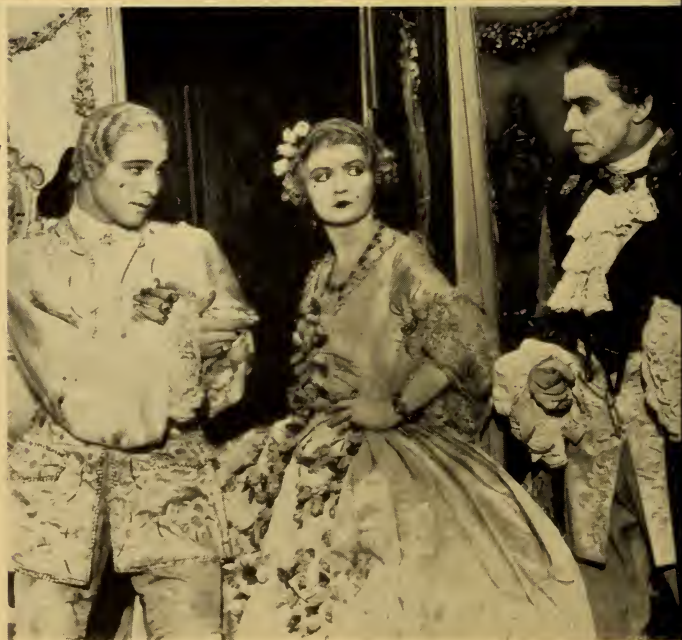
To Natacha's dismay the Voisin people sent a racing specialist and they were bumped about continuously as the car



Two studies
from *Monsieur
Beaucaire*, the
picture which
provided a
glamorous back-
ground for the
return of the
Great Lover
after an eventful
absence



Two scenes
from the lavish
*Monsieur Beau-
caire*. The lead-
ing lady is Doris
Kenyon



raced northwards, arriving at Cherbourg in the middle of the night. They found that they had missed by a matter of minutes the last ferry boat to the *Leviathan*. It would be necessary to hire a boat of their own if they were to board the liner.

The port was now being swept by ice-cold rain and bitter winds, but they decided to proceed with their plan. They hired a boat and inquired about the luggage from Paris. They found to their dismay that it had not yet been brought from the railway station to the dockyard. They visited the station only to find it shut for the night. An official was roused from sleep, the luggage located and loaded on to trolleys. Then, following a procession of porters pushing trolleys, they went to the customs shed where the luggage had to be inspected.

While the baggage was being assembled for inspection the tired travellers ate a meal in a small café near the quay. The weather worsened, developing into a violent Atlantic storm which drenched the town. They returned to the customs shed soaked and disheartened and only to meet further difficulties. Only a few days earlier, it seemed, two priceless Gobelin tapestries had been stolen from Versailles, and the French Government had issued an order that every piece of luggage leaving the country over a certain weight had to be opened and examined by the customs authorities. To the officials at Cherbourg this rain-soaked couple, prepared to risk life and limb in a desperate bid to reach an Atlantic liner at the height of a storm in an open boat piled high with luggage, appeared particularly suspect. Despite pleadings and protestations from the Valentinos the customs men opened every large trunk and a considerable number of suitcases, examined the contents of each with meticulous care and totted up a costly bill of duty.

Meanwhile the storm grew fiercer. The delay at the quayside was heart-rending. Eventually, with an air that they had failed to ensnare two guilty people, the customs officials gave them permission to load their boat. They set off for the liner amid a storm of frightening force.

The little boat so heavily laden tossed and heaved in the heavy seas and often threatened to capsize or submerge beneath the weight of the baggage. Natacha, forced to hang grimly on to the side of the boat with both hands, nearly lost her jewels case, but Rodolpho caught it a second before it would have slithered over

the side. As he too required both hands free the case was handed to a sailor. The storm grew wilder, the wind more biting and their bodies were chafed pitilessly by their sodden clothes.

It proved impossible to board the liner. The waves would have smashed the boat against the great ship's sides. They returned to Cherbourg in a state of near collapse.

After seeing the luggage unloaded and returned to the customs shed Rodolpho and Natacha trudged to a small commercial hotel in the town. It was full. Unable to take one step farther they spent the remainder of the night in the hotel's public room amid withered palms and commercial travellers' cigarette ends. The next morning the storm had abated. There was no sign of the *Leviathan*.

They took a room for the day at a larger, more comfortable hotel and rested there until evening. Another ship, the *President Adams*, called *en route* to Southampton and they secured berths on it. They sailed out to this ship on a sea calm and romantically silvered by the moon, a clear sky sparkling with stars above them. But they were in no mood to appreciate its romantic grandeur, for they were still tired and worried lest missing the *Leviathan* had affected a vital business deal.

The moment they arrived in London they contacted Williams. What important business had prompted his urgent summons? Important business? Williams said there was none. He had merely planned a party aboard the liner, for which he had hired an orchestra and it would have been so nice if they had been able to attend.

Two days later they sailed for America.

Chapter Eleven

THE day after they returned from Europe the lawsuit was settled.

It was arranged that Valentino should make two more films for the Famous Players Lasky Corporation at a salary of seven thousand five hundred dollars a week and with considerable influence in the choice of the two subjects to be filmed as well as the manner of their production. After that he would work to the terms of a new contract that he had signed with J. D. Williams's new company, Ritz-Carlton Pictures Incorporated.

This contract stipulated that he had a completely free hand in all productions in which he starred—choice of story, director and supporting cast and final word about the sets to be used.

It was a moment of triumph for Rodolpho and Natacha. Valentino was re-entering the film industry a supreme power. Never in the industry's history had an actor risen to such a position—and it had been the public that had won this battle for him, giving him the power to decide what films he should make and at what salary. Other films in which he had starred were still drawing money, the fan-mail from 'unseen friends' still arrived by the sackful, and magazines and newspapers still kept his name prominently before the public because, whether or not he was acting, he was still the public's King of Romance and their great interest.

That he had obtained the public's lasting affection was the deciding factor in the lawsuit, for it was obvious that any company which starred him would reap colossal profits. Therein had lain the power behind his determination never to submit to the demands of Famous Players. If they continued to prevent him from working they were merely losing certain profits. Ultimately, Rodolpho and Natacha had known, their terms would be met, that a company could not turn its back for ever on so proven a box-office asset. This knowledge had allowed them to run up debts

which now amounted to one hundred thousand dollars and to go on spending without an anxious thought of them.

Now the way ahead was clear.

The first of the two films to be made for Famous Players was to be produced in New York, and so the Valentinos took a suite at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, a fitting background to the luxurious mode of life to which they had accustomed themselves. For his new salary was a triumph in itself. Famous Players had paid him one thousand dollars a week to play in *The Young Rajah*; now they had increased it sevenfold to a record seven thousand five hundred dollars. Of a number of film subjects suggested two appealed to him greatly—*Captain Blood* and *Monsieur Beaucaire*—and eventually he decided upon *Monsieur Beaucaire*. Preparations went ahead for a lavish production.

In a spectacular costume picture the Screen's Greatest Lover was to make his return. All the resources of an industry were to be concentrated on making it a wonder film—the finest technicians, a huge cast of carefully chosen players, the best artists and designers and costumiers, plus an enormous sum of money. The film was to be built around the box-office appeal of one man. Valentino was to be the central figure, a power above the director and producer and the men who had provided the money. It was a dizzy height for a man of twenty-nine to have reached.

Yet, while the whole might of an industry gathered about Valentino and was at his command, Rodolpho in his world was enslaved to Natacha.

In her work as an art director she had never had much say in how a film should be made. She had had authority only in matters of casting and the design of the sets. Now there was no detail of the production that she could not question or change if she wished, even to the embarrassment of the director. If anyone raised an objection the matter was referred to Valentino and in his eyes she was perfect. Natacha always knew best. Therefore, any change she ordered must be carried out. He supported her in everything with loyalty and zeal, though not always with wisdom.

As the film of *Monsieur Beaucaire* progressed Natacha became more and more involved in the production. For the first time in her career she had been allowed to look into the technical complexities of film making and she found them fascinating. She worked tire-

lessly and absorbed all the details of method, pried into production secrets and acquired a thorough knowledge of the skill and cunning employed to achieve special effects. Direction, sets, lighting, camera, script, planning, administration—she studied every facet, piling up knowledge that she planned to use one day. The time would come, she knew, when she herself would make a film, welding all these aspects of production into a medium for her own self-expression. She would produce a masterpiece in the shape of a *great* film which would make her mistress of a twentieth-century art form.

A *great* film—there lay the answer to her soul's craving. Therefore, she must have knowledge of every phase of production, of everything she would need for the eventual release of these artistic longings pent up inside her. She devoted her days to learning everything just as once she had laboured, not sparing herself, to perfect grace of movement under the expert eye of Kosloff. On this production she was not just the wife of the star but an artist preparing for the fulfilment of her destiny.

This was an exciting time for Rodolpho and Natacha. Each had found an outlet for their energies. He was gloriously happy to be back in front of the arc-lamps in make-up and costume, again playing the dashing hero winning lovely maidens. She at last had found the answer to everything. Clearly she saw her aim in life; methodically she planned its achievement.

They were happy both in their work and personal life, and though the days at the studio were long and arduous they returned home with a deep feeling of satisfaction which made their exhaustion worth while. They seldom went out in the evenings but preferred to remain in their hotel suite quietly talking, dreaming of the future and all they were going to do. Rodolpho would relax in a lounging suit of black satin with red lapels and red stripes down the trousers, while Natacha would sit beside him in a flowing creation of ivory satin embroidered in gold, which would have smothered the beauty of most women but to her was merely a becoming aura.

Relaxed though bodily tired they would be completely at ease. But even in such moments as these when Natacha's clear voice broke the silence it would give proof of the ceaseless striving of her mind after an ideal of self-expression. It was almost an

affliction, a curse, this longing to create. It had been born in her, nurtured in Europe, and now it was the whole strength of her being, the driving force behind every effort of her body and mind. It gave her no rest, not even in moments of exhaustion; it pressed her on and on towards the moment when she would stand back, her great work complete—a film entirely written, designed and produced by Natacha Rambova.

It was of this ambition that she spoke during these quiet, tired moments with her husband—and his great love assured her that it would be so.

Everything went well with the production of *Monsieur Beaucaire*. Natacha had felt her ground, infiltrated, asserted herself. She made suggestions which, with her all-powerful husband looking on, were nothing less than orders, but she restrained the full force of her influence, realizing that she was as yet learning. Her day would come but this period must be one of preparation for it.

Rodolpho, happy to be working again and delighted to have with him on the set a wife who took such an interest in his work, threw himself into the part and played it with heart and soul. Everyone engaged in the production, knowing the huge amount of money being gambled on its success, put their very best into the work and all went smoothly. The film was completed on schedule and just as soon as the studio floors could be cleared of its magnificent sets the next film, the last Valentino would make for Famous Players, was begun.

It was called *The Sainted Devil* and Nita Naldi was chosen to play in support. This cultured, European actress was an admirer of Natacha's and one of the few women apart from Nazimova able to work with her without friction arising.

Another celebrated actress was also engaged to play an important role in the film. Her name was Jetta Goudal, a Frenchwoman. Jetta Goudal was talented, exotic in her tastes, temperamental and very strong willed.

By this time Natacha's power had grown. She had learned a great deal very quickly during the making of *Monsieur Beaucaire* and now felt more certain of herself. From the beginning of the filming of *The Sainted Devil* it was clear that something was bound to happen between two such strong personalities as Jetta Goudal and Natacha. It was not long in coming about.

The French actress was to play a part which required elaborate costuming. Her exotic taste was nothing short of fantastic when exerted upon the process of conceiving her gowns for the film and her imagination uncontrolled by any consideration for the effect they might have on the film as a whole. The startling dresses she conceived would have ruined scenes and were in any case impossible to make. Two eminent costumiers found them so difficult that they refused to accept the more spectacular designs. Some action had to be taken and taken quickly, for the delay was assuming alarming proportions in terms of money, and with courage and common sense Natacha swiftly settled the matter. Miss Goudal was *out* and another actress was *in*.

The French actress was furious. She hated the interference of Natacha, this woman who had dared to dictate to her. She publicly expressed great bitterness and attributed the reasons for her dismissal to personal jealousy on the part of Natacha. Miss Goudal hinted that Valentino himself had become strongly attracted to her and that this had displeased Natacha so much that she had resorted to firing her out of retribution.

Natacha paid no attention to this. She was above the petty spites of her sex and much too interested in the work in hand to waste time defending herself in a matter that was so ridiculous.

For ridiculous it was. Everyone who came into contact with the Valentinos knew that Miss Goudal's charge was unfounded and that Rodolpho loved his wife only, and above everything. He thought of no one but her. His love was so great that he did not resent her dominance in the sphere in which he should have held the power. She could interfere, change and decide what she wished even in matters which closely concerned his career and popularity, and he raised no objection nor felt any resentment or jealousy of his wife. She was his whole world.

Therefore, everyone at the studio laughed at Jetta Goudal's implication—but the world outside did not laugh. The public believed there to be truth in her allegations. Was not Valentino the Screen's Greatest Lover, a man who had twice married, had once been arrested for bigamy, and did he not adore beautiful women? Such a man would hardly hesitate to make love to a woman of Jetta Goudal's beauty. Would the fact that he was married prevent The Sheik from following his desires? Once again, and in defiance

of the facts, the public believed Valentino to be what they wanted him to be—the man of countless *affaires*, the lover with the roving eye and a heart as free as his conquests were many. They would rather have the Great Lover clear of deep attachments, free to love at will, than tied to one woman even by matrimonial bonds. He was *their* lover; he belonged to them.

The filming of *The Sainted Devil* progressed without further incident. Natacha worked hard. Her ability as an artist was never questioned, though many disliked her. They disliked her cold manner and were jealous of her power. In Hollywood it was being whispered that she hen-pecked Rodolpho and dominated him completely. This spate of rumour was not surprising, for Rodolpho everywhere displayed a boyish eagerness to please her and to grant her every wish. He did as she suggested and made no secret of it. He loved and admired her so much that he felt no loss of pride in taking her lead. She was always right—he believed that without doubt.

Monsieur Beaucaire had been released and the public clamoured to see it. They were overjoyed to have the Great Lover back in a new picture after a screen absence of two years, and they flocked to see him making love to a French princess and a haughty English lady. The absence of new Valentino films over so long a period had in no way diminished his appeal. In fact, the appeal had increased. The many incidents of his private life had been exploited by publicity agents—the strangely brief marriage to Jean Acker, the bigamy charge, the Jetta Goudal incident—and huge quantities of publicity material had issued from the studios. People who had never seen him were anxious to do so, for they had read so much about him. His old admirers had complained of the absence of new Valentino movies and had stayed away from cinemas in protest. The total effect of the two-year absence had in reality been to increase his audience immensely.

The Sainted Devil began its showings and the slogan 'Valentino Loves Again' became the key to more box-office gold. The Valentino prestige was greater than ever. He was fully in the public eye, acting for great audiences, and drawing an enormous salary, while in his private life he was supremely happy. Natacha was close to him in everything and even now she was planning his next step—a film that would raise him to heights as an *actor*.

In this new film, which she herself was writing, he would play the part of a Moor and would in consequence wear a beard and darken his skin. He would *act*, she stressed, not merely crush maidens in his powerful arms and press kisses on their resisting loveliness. She told him the story. It dealt with the Moors who had once occupied part of Spain and she described to him the great spectacles that it would bring to the screen, the magnificence of scenes in Moorish palaces. Nita Naldi would be an ideal co-star in the role of a Moorish beauty—and the film would be called *The Scarlet Power*.

During the production of *The Sainted Devil* Natacha had devoted every free moment to the conception of this story, and now she worked ceaselessly to finish it before they entered the employ of Ritz-Carlton Pictures Incorporated. This was to be the child of her brain, her supreme chance, and the first subject of their own choice that they would present to J. D. Williams.

Never had she been happier. Her adoring husband, whom she had raised to a peak of power, was now rewarding her with the services of a whole industry through which to express herself. In turn, she showed him her own gratitude, poured love and affection upon him until he was dazed with the thrill of it.

Natacha completed *The Scarlet Power* and when they joined the new company Rodolpho duly presented the scenario to Williams stating that this was the subject he had chosen to make first. According to the terms of the contract the company had to abide by his decision.

Preparations for the production were begun. Nita Naldi's services were secured. Then the Valentinos announced that they would go to Europe to purchase properties and effects for the film, including authentic Moorish costumes and jewellery, and would visit ancient Moorish palaces upon which designs for the sets would be based.

The Scarlet Power was to be a work of art and Natacha was determined to use the most scrupulous care in all matters concerning it.

Again the film company could raise no objection, although they knew these to be Natacha's plans. The demands and conditions were being issued by Valentino and there could be no challenge. The contract stated that Valentino decided the subject to be

filmed, the entire supporting cast, the manner of production, and the sets to be used.

Natacha supplied all these details and Rodolpho laid them before the company. Williams had to accept them. His company was carrying out the plans and wishes of Natacha issuing them through her all-powerful husband.

In August 1924 they sailed for Europe with permission from Ritz-Carlton Pictures to spend forty thousand dollars on its behalf in the purchase of the necessary properties for *The Scarlet Power*.

To Natacha this was permission to browse at will among the treasures of Europe selecting from among them those she considered essential to the gilding of her masterpiece.

Chapter Twelve

THEY went first to Paris and on arrival Natacha began work on the designing of the costumes for her film.

With great skill and artistry she created on paper the most exquisite robes and gowns and then left these drawings with renowned costumiers to be made up.

While his wife was thus engaged, Rodolpho collected the Voisin tourer he had ordered during their previous visit to Paris. It was a magnificent affair—steel grey with an interior of brilliant red morocco leather. He was to try out the car on the trip south to Nice where Natacha and he were to spend a short while before travelling to Spain.

Despite the car's formidable power Rodolpho drove it carefully on the road to Nice and they arrived at the Château Juan Les Pins in a calm state of mind and in magnificent style—on the front seat beside Rodolpho sat the doberman, the dog given to him by Monsieur Hebertot, while Natacha, beautifully gowned and wrapped in a new and expensive fur coat, sat in the back with five Pekinese.

Ahead of them the Valentinos had sent a full-scale cinema projection machine and a print of *Monsieur Beaucaire* with the intention of giving a private showing to Mr. and Mrs. Hudnut and Maria, who was their guest. Immediately upon arrival Rodolpho set about putting the machine together, for it had been necessary to dismantle it in transit. As he greatly enjoyed dabbling in mechanical things the task was very much to his taste, and soon he had reconstructed the apparatus and had adapted the library for use as a projection room.

Shortly before dinner he announced that the projector was in perfect working order and called the family into the library to witness a test. He said that he would run the first reel at once to whet their appetites for the entire film which he would project after dinner.

There were exclamations of delight as the gorgeous *Beaucaire*

settings appeared on the screen, but just before the film reached the point at which the Great Lover makes his entrance the main electricity fuses blew and the entire Château Juan Les Pins was plunged into darkness.

The *château* had no system of emergency lighting and only six candles could be found. The chef insisted upon the use of these in order that he might do justice to the dinner, and the family was left in the dark. The Valentinos' six dogs made this an evening fraught with danger especially as Natacha's Pekinese were accustomed to trot at their mistress's heels.

The following day a local electricity firm replaced the fuses while Rodolpho and Natacha went shopping in Nice. He was collecting armour now and she was collecting ivories, two extravagant hobbies that helped them to spend to the limit of their huge income.

That evening another attempt was made to run through *Monsieur Beaucaire* with the result that the main fuses blew again. Mr. Hudnut was prepared for the eventuality this time, however, and was able to produce a large supply of candles. That night the lovely old *château* regained its seventeenth-century grace when its fine rooms and superb furnishings were given a touch of magic by candlelight.

It was fully a week before they were able to show the film because they discovered that the main cable to the house carried current sufficient only to supply ordinary domestic needs. A new cable had to be laid before Rodolpho could use his projector with safety, and during the time it took to lay the cable he dismantled the Hudnuts' electric piano. He said it did not mark time evenly. Unfortunately the instrument in all its intricacy needed the touch of an expert and Rodolpho, who neglected to number the pieces he dismantled, was never able to put it together again. The Hudnuts had eventually to summon a man from England who understood it.

Rodolpho's fondness for mechanical things was only one example of his continuing boyishness. He still dreamed and schemed as wildly as he had done in his boyhood. He devised a plan to build a boathouse in the grounds of the *château* and a tunnel leading from it to the beach. The beach was a considerable distance away and a road separated it from the grounds. The

scheme would have been exceptionally costly. He gave no thought to the cost of such plans. It never crossed his mind that his wealth and power to earn more might not last for ever. He had quite forgotten how quickly that eight hundred pounds with which he had arrived in America had disappeared and that once he had nearly starved.

When the cooler days of autumn arrived the Valentinos set out for Spain, again accompanied by Natacha's aunt. They did not travel by car this time. It had been Rodolpho's intention to do so, but the two women had been adamant and he had at last agreed to travel by train.

Natacha, who had travelled in Spain before and knew the conditions there, was a little disconcerted when she saw the amount of luggage that her husband intended to take. A considerable proportion of this was photographic equipment. Cameras had become a mania with him and he owned them in every shape and size.

The little party occupied three compartments on the train—one for Rodolpho and Natacha, one for Mrs. Werner, and a third for their voluminous baggage. Leaving or changing trains made the women regret that they had not insisted on Rodolpho bringing only essentials, because there were often no porters at the stations, and they had themselves to remove all their things from the trains to taxis or coaches outside the stations. The women felt foolish in this task and Natacha thought they must look like a little band of wandering minstrels.

The first stop was Madrid. The moment they had settled into the Ritz Hotel, Rodolpho announced that he must leave the women for a while and went off to see an exhibition of armour he had read about. When he returned he was full of praise of the exhibition and insisted that they too should see it. Natacha and her aunt hurried through a meal and arrived just in time to see the doors of the exhibition closing. The rest of the day was spent sightseeing and exploring antique shops. They spent a small fortune in antiques, mostly armour, weapons, ivories and jade.

Seville was their next stop. Juan Gallardo, the hero of *Blood and Sand*, was supposed to have lived in Seville. Although the story was largely fiction, Ibanez had drawn his character of Juan around the life of a matador who had actually lived there. From the *con-*

cierge at the hotel, Rodolpho got the address of the house where this man had lived and the party set out to see it.

Rodolpho was very excited at this prospect of visiting the real-life counterpart of a place he had lived in during one of his most wonderful dreams, but it turned out to be a miserable dwelling occupied by poor and slovenly peasants and not at all as he had imagined it to be. When he had portrayed Juan Gallardo he had imagined that the matador lived as magnificently as he loved. Seeing this hovel shattered the dream and saddened Rodolpho.

In the same street as the bullfighter's house lived a tradesman who purchased the clothes and costumes of matadors and toreadors killed in the arenas. These costumes were never retained by the relatives of the men as they were supposed to bring evil fortune. Gorgeous suits of silk velvet embroidered in gold, which had originally cost a great deal, could be purchased from this man comparatively cheaply.

Rodolpho visited him and was dazzled by the colourful costumes. He asked if there was a suit which had belonged to the matador whose house they had visited but it transpired there was not, only a suit which had belonged to his closest friend. Rodolpho bought this costume. The bolero was of black velvet so closely embroidered with gold that the velvet could hardly be seen, and the cape was of royal purple silk velvet embroidered with gold. The costume delighted Natacha and her aunt, and became one of Rodolpho's proudest possessions. In those distant days when he had lain in the hot Italian sunshine, he had seen himself as a hero clad in just such magnificence.

Now it was his great desire to see a bullfight and though the women at first refused, saying that it was encouraging cruelty to animals to support such a sport, they agreed in the end to please him.

To the arena he took two bulky cameras, a motion picture one and another for still photographs. The vivid sunshine made the brilliant colours of the Spanish women's dresses dazzling to the eye. In the boxes ringing the arena were the most beautiful women of Seville, wearing traditional dresses and high Spanish combs beautifully carved out of tortoise-shell and studded with jewels. The mantillas of black or cream lace gracefully draped over these combs fascinated Natacha and Mrs. Werner and they exclaimed

in such wonder at the gorgeous shawls draped over the balcony rails that Rodolpho promised to buy them some.

The bullfights proved a wonderful spectacle and the party was thrilled. They aroused Rodolpho to an intense pitch of excitement and he trembled in moments of tension and leapt to his feet and roared when the bull was killed. He was so completely held by it that he forgot his cameras and took no pictures.

The bullfight now became his passionate interest. When they returned to the hotel for dinner he persuaded his wife and Mrs. Werner to agree to accompany him later in the evening to a farm outside Seville to which bulls from all over Spain were brought in readiness for the fights. The trip was to be made in an open carriage which sounded pleasantly romantic to them and as the evening was sultry they dressed in thin gowns and took no wraps. The farm turned out to be a three-hour drive away and on arrival Rodolpho began a tour of the farm which lasted an hour. When they returned it was long past midnight and cold, and Natacha and her aunt had caught chills.

The Valentinos had not overlooked their real mission in Spain. They spent much time searching antique shops for articles that would be of use as properties in the film (which Natacha had now decided to call *The Hooded Falcon* instead of *The Scarlet Power*). They bought large quantities of costumes and materials and spent many days in the famous Alcazar taking photographs and sketching its exotic interior and beautiful courtyard and gardens. In one of the galleries of the palace they discovered a portrait of a nobleman of the fourteenth century, the period in which *The Hooded Falcon* was to be set. The portrait impressed them and Natacha thought it well if Rodolpho were to adapt his appearance to resemble it. He agreed and decided to begin at once—by growing a beard.

Apart from their purchases for the company they also spent lavishly in buying antiques for themselves. Their first major acquisition was a collection of shawls. Near the gate of the Alcazar was a shop which had the largest selection of antique shawls in Spain. There were shawls of the finest weave and in the most beautiful colours and designs. Natacha was enraptured with them. Standing with one of the choicest in her hands, she suddenly conceived the idea that they would make a considerable sum of money

by buying them in quantity and selling them in New York to exclusive Fifth Avenue dress *salons*. It seemed a wonderful scheme and on the strength of it they bought ten thousand dollars' worth of shawls to be shipped to America in bond.

The shawls were one of many purchases. Before the Valentinos had been long in Seville, antique dealers all over the city were packing up treasures to be shipped to the United States. These included ivories, jade, armour, two superb Renaissance doors, a Gothic chair and two Gothic chests.

From Seville the trio made its way to Granada, the last of the Moorish strongholds in Spain, and here Natacha expected to find the real inspiration for her sets.

In the Alhambra Palace, that pearl of Moslem art and culture, she recognized the settings for the story. With Rodolpho by her side she walked again and again through its shadowy marbled halls, through mosaic arches of fantastic delicacy, past fountained courtyards where the sadness of a lost glory seemed still to linger. She told Rodolpho the story of the great Boabdil who had had to flee with his court from this paradise, and showed him the luxury achieved by that older civilization. In the Alhambra gardens by moonlight she described to him how it had been those long years ago and her descriptions were so vivid, the atmosphere so enchanting that Rodolpho could almost hear the faint twang of a lute carried on the night air and the hushed laughter of some Moorish beauty.

They left these glories of the past with sadness and regret and travelled back to France half in a dream. All they had looked upon had cast its spell. Rodolpho had seen the grandeur of the settings he would move among when he played the role of the Moor. Dressed in stunning costumes he would relive the life of the great ones who had walked the marbled floors of the Alhambra. The story had caught his imagination and he looked forward eagerly to the day when they would begin filming. For her part, Natacha had derived immense satisfaction from the trip and in *The Hooded Falcon* would re-create much of what she had seen—and astonish the world with it.

In France they were joined by Nita Naldi who had been in Paris fitting the costumes Natacha had designed for her role. *The Hooded Falcon* had inspired her, too, and she was as eager to



VILMA BANKY supported Valentino in *The Eagle*



This picture was taken at the Marble Arch Pavilion cinema in London on November 23rd, 1925. The occasion was the first night of *The Eagle*

discuss it as were the Valentinos. They lingered in Paris several days, checking the final details of the costumes and talking incessantly about the film over meals in unfashionable cafés. Rodolpho, now bearded, arranged for his Voisin to be shipped to America.

Intent upon gaining all the useful pleasure they could from their European tour they now decided upon a tour of the old *châteaux* of the Loire, and Nita Naldi agreed to go with them. She was not so serious about her sightseeing as the Valentinos and proved an amusing companion. One day she caused a party of tourists to search the grounds of the castle at Chaumont for a Chinese princess with long nails and eyes like melting clouds who, to the indignation of those who had participated in the search, turned out to be Mimi, her Pekinese. At other times she related risqué stories in a voice that could be overheard and while being shown over Chaumont she noticed that the bedrooms of Catherine de Medici and her astrologer medium, Ruggieri, were connected by a short passage. Hollywood morals, she exclaimed in a voice audible to all in the tourist party, had nothing on Catherine's times.

The sightseeing went on until it was realized that they had spent all of three months in Europe. Arrangements were made to return to America and they sailed at long last in the *Leviathan*.

A horde of newspaper reporters met the liner the moment it docked in New York.

Sensation of sensations! The Great Lover was wearing a beard!

The man whose appearance the American male so closely imitated had actually grown a beard.

In a matter of weeks beards would be in fashion again in the United States.

The Hooded Falcon, the European treasure hunt, Natacha's plans, Rodolpho's future—everything paled in interest in the eyes of the newspaper reporters in comparison to this sensational new development—the beard on the chin of the King of Romance. Every newspaper mentioned it—and there was an uproar.

On the whole disapproval was expressed. The Hairdressers' Union of America issued instructions to all its members that they were to boycott Valentino's films until he had shaved off the beard. It threatened a part of their livelihood. Few of his 'unseen friends'

wanted a bearded lover and they expressed disapproval in a shower of indignant letters. His publicity advisers were unanimous—no beard.

And so Rodolpho, promising his wife that he would grow it again when the time came to begin work on *The Hooded Falcon*, shaved off his beard. The public had won again.

Chapter Thirteen

THE first thing the Valentinos had to do on their return to America was to establish a home in New York.

The newly formed Ritz-Carlton Pictures Incorporated planned to make their films in New York and Rodolpho had contracted to play in two of them. The first, *The Hooded Falcon*, would take some further months to prepare and a long time to film. The second, the subject for which they would also choose, was likely to be another long and elaborate production. In all, they might be a year in New York and they did not want to spend such a period in the impersonal surroundings of a hotel suite. So they took the lease of an apartment at 270 Park Avenue, the rent for which was huge, and furnished it expensively, installing there many of the treasures they had brought back from Europe.

It was while they were living in this apartment that they awoke one morning to read in the newspapers that J. D. Williams had bought the film rights of a New York stage success, *Cobra*, as a subject for Valentino.

Rodolpho and Natacha were astounded by this news, since it cut directly across the contract terms relating to choice of material. They at once telephoned Williams. He admitted that he had given these details to the Press but explained that he had bought the rights of the play on speculation and had attached the Valentino name to it in order to enhance its value as a story property. They were greatly relieved to hear this and said they understood the Valentino name being used in this way. This made no difference at all, they said, providing Rodolpho was not expected to play in a film of it.

For many weeks Natacha and Rodolpho were kept busy in New York, making preparations for *The Hooded Falcon*. There were many conferences with J. D. Williams and others associated with his company. It was at one of these business meetings that the Valentinos first learned that the cost of *The Hooded Falcon* was to be limited to five hundred thousand dollars, whereas they had

for long been working to an estimated budget of from eight hundred and fifty thousand to a million dollars!

This was a crushing disappointment to Natacha. The reduced figure was going to limit her artistry, interfere with the re-creation of those magnificent Moorish palaces she had studied and drawn and photographed with such fond care. However, no matter how she might feel about it, the men who were financing the picture would not allow more than half a million dollars to be spent, and for once Natacha was helpless to oppose them. She acceded and began to plan on a less elaborate scale, although it hurt to be so frustrated in the creation of a work of artistic importance.

Hardly had this difficulty been dealt with than another more serious one arose. It was found that there was not enough studio space available in New York for so elaborate a production as *The Hooded Falcon*; the company saw no solution save a complete move to Hollywood—this just when the Valentinos had begun to feel settled in their New York apartment. They had taken the place on a long-term lease and would have to pay its colossal rental in addition to the running and upkeep of their Hollywood house. They thought of giving up the apartment but decided not to. If they were to move back to New York a new place would have to be found, furnished and decorated. It was a dilemma, but they kept on the apartment.

Thus, after only a few weeks in New York, they entrained for Hollywood—with Nita Naldi, Joe Henabery, who had directed *The Sainted Devil* and was signed to direct *The Hooded Falcon*; J. D. Williams and his business associates; Joseph Jackson, head of Ritz-Carlton's publicity department; Adrian, the designer; and George Ullman. And they arrived in Hollywood with everyone feeling impatient of the constant delays in getting *Falcon* under way. Now new schedules would have to be devised, the 'props' moved across the continent, small-part players (engaged in New York) transferred to Hollywood, extras recruited anew, and all office and communication services set up afresh. William Cameron Menzies, the scenic artist, had been engaged to do some of the settings and his creations would take some time to construct; this time-factor also applied to the making of the many exquisite costumes Adrian had designed.

It was nearly Christmas by the time preparations for Natacha's

film were begun in Hollywood and the Valentinos had settled into their comfortable home at Whitely Heights—and Christmas provided them with another opportunity to express their feelings for one another. Rodolpho gave Natacha a wrist-watch set in a moonstone studded with diamonds. Natacha gave Rodolpho a platinum slave bracelet which she solemnly clasped on his wrist. Rodolpho saw in the bracelet more than just a precious gift; it was to him a symbol of her love and affection and of his servitude to her beauty. He kissed her and expressed fervent gratitude and vowed that he would never remove from his wrist the bracelet which she had clasped upon it.

This exchange of gifts between the Valentinos was of considerable interest to the Press, and when the nature of the gifts was revealed the slave bracelet became the centre of a controversy. Valentino was criticized for wearing it. He would be copied, the newspapers said, and it was not a pleasant thing to envisage American males with bracelets on their wrists. A bracelet was an unorthodox and, therefore, unmanly adornment for the American male. They urged him to discontinue wearing it. Rodolpho ignored this criticism: he had shaved off his beard at public demand but this time he shut his ears to the uproar—and the bracelet remained on his wrist.

As soon as Christmas was over the Valentinos were busy again with *The Hooded Falcon*, though now it was clear that two months would elapse before filming could begin. This situation, unavoidable if Natacha's integrity as an artist was not to be upset, was most unsatisfactory to Ritz-Carlton, and J. D. Williams said that he could not see his company remain unproductive that much longer. Therefore, he proposed that in the interim Valentino should make *Cobra*, the play whose screen rights he had bought. Williams argued that as *Cobra* was a story with a modern setting, needing no expensive sets, it could be made easily and quickly without any great preparation. The Valentinos refused. When pressed for reasons, they explained that *Cobra* was most unsuited to Valentino and would certainly add nothing to his fame and popularity; it was a story of a modern American love intrigue and the character Valentino would portray *lost* the love of the woman he adored, which was not his style at all. No doubt it would draw the crowds, as would anything in which he appeared, but his

followers would be disappointed. *Cobra*, they said, would be a financial success but would damage Valentino's reputation as a star.

Despite the fact that their contract clearly stipulated that the choice of stories lay entirely with the Valentinos, Williams persisted with his proposal and after much discussion they gave in. Neither Natacha nor Rodolpho wanted serious trouble to arise so early in their association with Ritz-Carlton. In acceding, they imposed one condition—that *Cobra*, although to be made right away, should not be released to the cinemas until after *The Hooded Falcon* had been shown. This proviso was agreed to by the company and work was begun on *Cobra*.

George Ullman was appointed production manager on the film, but it was Natacha who was really in control. It was she who obtained the services of some of the finest creative minds in the business to make the film an artistic success. Exercising her skill and fascination to the full, she held these men under her spell and extracted from them the very best they were capable of giving. Ullman could do nothing but admire her talent and skill even though she had effectively taken the reins from him. Her amazing ability as an artist, her strength and judgment in authority were never more evident than in the making of *Cobra*.

There were one or two 'explosions' during the course of filming. The most serious of these was the replacement of the camera-man in mid-production which the company executives thought was courting disaster. In fact, it did not harm the picture, but no one admitted that this was due to Natacha's skill. They merely said that the expected does not always happen.

For Hollywood as a whole did not like Natacha. Her strength for long had been the insurmountable obstacle between the powers of the industry and the services of Valentino on terms of their own devising. From the moment when she had sat with Rodolpho in the darkness of a Hollywood cinema watching him prove his ability as an artist in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* she had been against the men who had continued at that phase to pay him three hundred and fifty dollars a week. The sensation he had created in *The Sheik* had shown her his magnetism, proved to her his unprecedented power to draw the crowds. Then she had seen *The Young Rajah* as a film made at low cost to cash in on the current drawing power of the Valentino name with no regard

for the more durable aspects of his work and reputation as an artist. Natacha, the complete artist herself, could not stand back and see a fellow artist so misused by the financial morons intent only upon box-office gold. It had to her seemed a gross injustice that Rodolpho should be used as a pawn in an industry interested only in exploiting him to financial ends—and thenceforward she determined that he should not be thrust into small, cheap and trifling films while other actors of lesser ability and popularity were given important stories and expensive productions. With courage unusual in a woman she had set out to fight the producers and force them to give him better films. She saw him as Robin Hood, as the Black Prince, as Hamlet, and such roles would undoubtedly have made him greater; but Hollywood saw him as a money spinner, an attitude which revolted her and which she was determined to destroy.

Natacha had opposed an entire industry. She had fought for Rodolpho's career; she had coupled her own immense strength and drive to his ability; and together they had succeeded. In the course of the battle, she had made no secret of her opinions of the men she opposed—and they knew and hated her. They said that her own ambition was the real spur, that she influenced her husband against them to further her own aims. She answered the charge calmly: it was her desire, she said, to incorporate artistic beauty into her husband's films as well as the glamorous essentials of box-office appeal. He drew the crowds but it was up to the industry to allow him to do it in a manner which increased rather than withdrew from his integrity as an artist. She wanted Valentino's pictures to be *artistic* successes as well as *commercial* successes, and although her artistic capabilities were ample proof that she was supremely fitted to ensure that they became so, she was hated and hindered by the powers she opposed. Her enemies—and now she was surrounded by them in Hollywood—insisted that it was her ambition alone which obsessed her and that she yearned to become, herself, a power in the industry. They said she was quite ruthless in support of this aim, even to the sacrifice of her husband's career, once by keeping him out of pictures for two years and now by delaying him again through the interminable vicissitudes of *The Hooded Falcon*.

Natacha had certainly become a power in the industry, a

supreme power in any company Valentino agreed to work for, but she was confident that she was using her power wisely and to her husband's advantage. Moreover, she was certain that she could make a film and that, as she knew Rodolpho better than did anybody, she could produce a Valentino picture to make his name still greater.

During the production of *Cobra* Natacha's activities on the sets became a heated talking point in Hollywood. She was interfering again, went the gossip, carving a career for herself and using her husband as the tool. She was dominating him, people said, hen-pecking him; she had him completely under her thumb. In the Valentinos' household (the malicious tongues wagged on) Natacha wore the pants. And that slave bracelet!

The gossip, like everything that concerned the Valentinos, quickly became copy for the newspapers. Day after day items appeared in the newspapers insinuating a state of affairs in which Valentino could only be thought of as a weakling being driven and cajoled by a woman of dominating ambition to an end that would be disastrous to his career.

From the outset the public was on his side and Natacha appeared the villainess. The more the newspapers delved into half truth, insinuation, surmise and sheer fantasy, the more the results resembled a concerted anti-Natacha crusade. So-called friends lost no time in showing Rodolpho these articles, expressing pity for him, while the sympathy of thousands came in the shape of a horde of letters from the 'unseen friends'. What a shame it was that he had a wife prepared to risk his career for her own selfish ends!

Rodolpho had been gloriously happy when work on *Cobra* began. Long days at the studios and Natacha there bustling about advising and correcting. Evenings together planning *The Hooded Falcon*, and happy interludes of just being a married pair; his personal life was sublime. Together they were working for his greater success in more magnificent films. He had become used to her being by his side and it hurt him bitterly to read these attacks upon the woman he adored. He was angered by the insinuations of friends that his wife was using him and he endeavoured to correct these misunderstandings. It was a joint effort, he tried to explain, and their aim was a mutual one—his greater success in artistically beautiful films.

The rebukes and explanations were not a sufficient antidote to the persistent poison of the gossips, and the married harmony of the Valentinos was endangered by the growing interest of the Press and public in that corner of his life from which previously they had been excluded. The quiet evenings they shared were now brought to an end by a demand from the Press, the public, the studio executives and the publicity men that the Great Lover must be seen out and about more frequently. They had, until then, rarely been seen together in Hollywood night clubs and had seldom attended the parties for which the city was notorious—and, as a result, Natacha was being publicly accused of jealousy and fear of allowing Valentino the company of other women. This was ridiculous, for at parties in the south of France she had encouraged him to dance with other women. They both enjoyed going out to have a good time—for pleasure's sake, but in Hollywood it seemed they must have a 'good time' whether or not they felt like it—for appearances sake.

No longer were they allowed to enjoy the contentment of evenings at home, reading books, studying ancient costumes and customs in the rare books they had acquired in Europe, learning more about the arts, talking and dreaming of the future. Yet these were the evenings they loved. Sometimes Rodolpho would cook an Italian meal for her. It would take so long to prepare that they were ravenously hungry by the time it was ready, but how they enjoyed it! These evenings of talking and laughing, the home-cooked food, the discussions of their common aims, were only a few of the many simple pleasures they shared in the privacy of the house on Whitely Heights and were a precious bond between them. Now, under pressure from the Press and the studio chiefs, the Valentinos had to go out, to be seen, to do the *expected* things. He owed it to his public, said the studios.

They had to join in the fun, giggle and gossip; they had to drink and laugh, dance and flirt—and all to make copy for the kind of stories about the Great Lover the public expected to read. It was bad for the box-office to let them think that Valentino was a simple-hearted, quiet-living man, deeply in love with his wife. It would be disastrous if they got the impression that he was hen-pecked and dominated and kept to the house so that he should not meet other women. The fabulous Valentino had to be gay, pleasure loving and,

At this time Joseph M. Schenk of United Artists came forward with an offer of a new contract for Valentino. Its various points were discussed by Natacha and Ullman in a conference which lasted a day and a half, and when Natacha felt that all of them had been covered and that they were acceptable both to her and to Rodolpho, she returned to Palm Springs leaving Ullman to negotiate the legal formalities of the contract in readiness for signing.

The agreement was drawn up and ready to be signed. Ullman informed the Valentinos. They returned to Hollywood together to attend a meeting at which the contract would be signed—and now a tremendous blow was delivered to Natacha.

The contract in its final form very clearly stated that Mrs. Valentino was to have no voice whatsoever in the production of any pictures which the company called upon Valentino to star in.

This was worse than the ultimatum that had been delivered by Williams; he had not ruled her out of the industry completely, but had merely insisted upon not making *The Hooded Falcon*, and upon Ritz-Carlton deciding the subjects. Now, in the pitiless prose of a contract clause, she saw herself black-balled by the powers she had opposed. It was an inestimable hurt to her pride.

She read the contract through once more. United Artists were the foremost of the Hollywood companies and had a tremendous organization. Their films were well produced for world-wide distribution. To be taken into their fold on the terms stipulated in this contract was in itself proof that Valentino had achieved the highest pinnacle of movie success. She would not stand in the way of so great an opportunity and one for which she, in fact, had prepared him. She advised Rodolpho to sign it and he did.

Rodolpho signed the contract—and in so doing separated his career from that of his wife. He broke the partnership which had so greatly helped to establish him as a star with a will and rights of his own. He destroyed the union which had made him an artist of integrity with power to adhere to it. They were man and wife still, but their professional lives, which had held them close, were now cast asunder to follow different paths.

Chapter Fourteen

THE United Artists contract signed, the Valentinos returned to Palm Springs to rest while the new company searched for a suitable first subject. It had already been decided that this would be a costume role and that once again he would be a dashing hero rescuing fair ladies and forcing his love upon them. That was the kind of part he liked to play and that was the kind of film the public wanted to see him in.

Rodolpho had many reasons to be happy about the new agreement. It was going to bring him a still greater salary—nearly half a million dollars a year—plus a percentage of the profits his films made, and cautious estimation suggested that this would be in the region of another half a million dollars yearly.

This fantastic income was to be in addition to all manner of other considerations to be shown to him as a star. Valentino, who had been the first screen star with authority to choose his own stories, now became the first star to have a special bungalow built for him at the studios for his personal use. Previously, no star player had been treated so differently from the rest of the cast. Through this new agreement, he had raised 'star status' to an altogether new high standard of luxury and power, establishing a precedent in the attitude of film makers to their key players. It was a triumph.

And the woman who had been the strength that had raised him to these heights had been cast out by the powers she had opposed, by the enemies she had made while helping her husband to achieve this pinnacle. For long they had cherished an opportunity to ostracize her and now they had succeeded. She was out. True, Rodolpho's success was as much her own as his, but it had cost her the crash of her dreams. She was not, after all, to make her great film, brilliant with magnificent scenes, dazzling with gorgeous costumes, Rodolpho playing the star role, millions flocking to see him and to gasp at the wonders of *her* creation. Instead, he would be on the screen again in stereotyped roles. His films would be

successful, but she would have no part in their success, no share in the applause they earned. She was now the wife of a star. Hollywood had won after all.

As Redolpho was to work in Hollywood, he and Natacha began to look around for a new house, a bigger and better house than the residence on Whitely Heights. The old one was no longer good enough for a star of his position, too near to the studios and the rank commercialism of Hollywood, as well as crammed to the hilt with an overflow of possessions. On Beverly Hills they found an ideal site, eight and a half acres of land on the side of a hill from which they could look out over the city of Los Angeles to the Pacific beyond. On nearby hills stood the palatial homes of other top stars. Charlie Chaplin, Marion Davies, Harold Lloyd, John Gilbert, Fred Thompson and his wife, Frances Marion, *élite* of the film colony, all had magnificent homes nearby. This new home, they decided, would be the final setting for all the beautiful things they had collected in Europe, and would be so designed that each treasure would be given its rightful place of glory. The house would be called: Falcon Lair.

Despite the prospect of the new house and planning its design, furnishings and scheme of decoration, Natacha was not happy. They continued to live at Palm Springs where they could avoid the pesterings that beset them at the house on Whitely Heights, but the days were empty for her now. She had nothing with which to employ her mind, nothing to feed her creative instincts, no prospect before her save that of being the wife of Hollywood's brightest star—and that was not her elected role.

It was not to be a mere wife that she had trained during those early years in Europe, cramming her mind full of knowledge. It was not to become a mere wife that she had made herself respected and feared and hated. Any female born could be a wife. Natacha Rambova was different. She had talent and knowledge, and it was a crime not to use them. Besides, she was capable of making a film and she knew the intricacies of every process of movie-making. Then why should she not make a film?

Those months of toil to create *The Hooded Falcon* were wasted. All the magnificence her mind had conceived had been cast aside as 'uncommercial'. It was not *artistic* prestige the film magnates wanted, but merely box-office returns. Very well, she would

prove to them that she was perfectly capable of producing a *commercial* film successfully.

She told Rodolpho her intentions. He agreed with her that she was capable of making a film and that one day, just as soon as his new contract had brought him a sufficient sum of money, he would finance it. But Natacha could not wait. How would she spend her time until then? She must begin right away.

Rodolpho's finances were very strained at this moment. On their last visit to Europe they had spent lavishly. Of the ten thousand dollars' worth of shawls acquired in Seville, not one had been resold as planned but for the main part had been given away to friends in moods of princely extravagance. They had purchased ten thousand dollars worth of ivories, a huge collection of armour and weapons, choice antique furniture, gorgeous brocades and tapestries. There had been the cost of the New York apartment and the running of the Whitely Heights house while for most of the time they lived elsewhere. Now he had purchased more land and had started to build Falcon Lair.

He was heavily in debt again. The huge sums he had been earning had not kept pace with expenditure. Rodolpho did not want to become involved in further financial tangles which were inevitable if Natacha went ahead with the production of her film. Besides, there would be all the anxieties and problems of it constantly arising to interfere with his own work for United Artists. He pleaded with her to wait.

But Natacha could not wait. With silky-voiced insistence she continued to press the idea, bombarding him with questions. Why could she not begin at once? Would not money be coming in regularly as always? All the worries of the venture would fall upon her shoulders. Was it not to be a commercial film, easy and cheap to make?

Unwilling to quarrel with his wife yet unable to answer her arguments satisfactorily, Rodolpho took to riding alone in the desert. He was distraught. How could he deny his beloved wife anything? Yet how could he, at this moment, afford to let her go ahead with her scheme? She was unhappy—and if she was unhappy she might leave him. And she was his world.

Deeply perplexed Rodolpho telephoned George Ullman and told him to drive to Palm Springs at once, not letting anything

detain him. It was the most imperative summons the business manager had ever received. Ullman left Hollywood immediately and arrived at the desert house to be told that Rodolpho was out riding.

He found Natacha alone by the fire, confined to the house with a sprained knee, but nevertheless very busily occupied, a litter of books, drawings, magazines and papers all about her. Before he had time even to sit down, she was firing questions at him concerning the cost of producing an independent film. Would an inexpensive film be commercially practical? Ullman told her that an inexpensive film of quality was commercially practical *if* she could make one. Of course she could make one. Now for details: how much would it cost? Where could it be made? Would the big circuits book it. . . .?

When Rodolpho returned from riding, he was drawn into the conference. Ullman was astonished to see him looking so tired, to notice how frayed his nerves were. He should have been resting, gathering his energy and clearing his mind in preparation for his return to Hollywood. But there was no fight left in Rodolpho, only fear of losing Natacha. He would go to any lengths, he told Ullman, risk any financial crash rather than lose her.

Before Ullman left Palm Springs Natacha had got her way. On a budget of thirty thousand dollars she would make a film to be called *What Price Beauty*. It would make clever fun of the agonies women endured, and the time and money they spent, in efforts to achieve and preserve beauty.

The Valentinos returned to Hollywood. Rodolpho began work on *The Eagle*, a screen adaptation of the novel by Pushkin, which had been agreed upon as his first United Artists' subject. Natacha went ahead with the production of *What Price Beauty*. Nita Naldi, in proof of her friendship for Natacha, stayed in Hollywood to star in the film in defiance of a contract which called her to New York.

Following different paths, Rodolpho and Natacha had less in common. They no longer planned together; each was concerned with a separate work. Rodolpho still felt that he was working to build a magnificent life for *both* of them, for which the new home taking shape on Beverly Hills would provide a richer setting. The wealth that would come rolling in would be spent in providing



Two scenes from *The Son of the Sheik*. Left Valentino as the young sheik with Vilma Banky. Below A "still" from the flashback sequence with Valentino as the old sheik and Agnes Ayres, who had co-starred with him in *The Sheik*





The Great Lover formula was developed to its ultimate with *The Son of the Sheik*. Valentino and Vilma Banky in a scene from the film, the last he was to make

treasures to lay at her feet. His life's purpose was still to make her happy.

With Natacha, however, work was of first importance, and when that work had been closely tied with her husband's, Rodolpho, too, had loomed large in her life. Now he was no longer her partner in a joint enterprise, merely husband to that part of her which was woman. And in Natacha there was little of woman. She was nearly all artist, and the artist in her was busy with a film. There was scarcely time or interest left for Rodolpho. She grew cold with him, had little to say in the brief periods they spent together, and showed no great interest in what he was doing. His work no longer concerned her; she had been ruled out of his career. She had her own way to make, her own life to build, her own destiny to fulfil.

Extremely hurt by this new attitude, Rodolpho threw himself into his work in an effort to shake Natacha's coldness from his mind, but his heart was heavy at having lost that oneness of purpose with her. To watch her grow indifferent and aloof shattered his peace of mind.

Yet as cold indifference developed into complete opposition in many things, hurt pride became irritation, and irritation gave way to anger. The cost of Natacha's film, which was to have been limited to thirty thousand dollars, now rose steadily to nearly one hundred thousand dollars. In his precarious financial state this knowledge weighed on his mind heavily. In small things, too, differences developed into heated arguments.

Beltram Masses, a portrait painter, arrived in Hollywood to paint the portraits of Rudolph Valentino and Marion Davies. No sooner had the painter completed these portraits than he was called upon by other stars who wished to sit for him. Valentino and Marion Davies were so pleased with his work that they felt financial reward was not sufficient an expression of appreciation and so they arranged an elaborate private reception for the artist. At this reception the paintings were to be exhibited to show everyone the artist's capabilities. Valentino and Marion Davies planned everything and Natacha's approval and co-operation as co-hostess were sought. She was not co-operative. Instead, she was indignant that she had not been among the first to know of the plan.

When the evening of the reception arrived, she refused to

attend. Rodolpho pleaded with her. He pointed out how rude it would appear not to attend a reception at which they were the hosts. Eventually, Natacha yielded, but it was not until a very late hour that they arrived at the reception together, greeted the guests and then returned home, for Natacha refused to stay. The guests, including many of the leaders of Los Angeles society, felt insulted and were not slow to voice their indignation at being so flouted by "mere movie people".

By the time *What Price Beauty* was completed the private life of the Valentinos had reached a precarious point. Natacha often went out driving by herself and sometimes stayed away for several days. Rodolpho, still hoping that they could be happy together, completed the purchase of Falcon Lair and began to have their treasured possessions in New York transported across the continent to Hollywood in readiness for the day when they would move into the new home.

The newspapers had been scenting the personal differences in the Valentino household and stories were being printed forecasting a separation. Every incident revealing disagreement or friction found its way into print by some means or other. Hollywood gossip had reached boiling point and the outcome was impatiently awaited.

The tension of interest on the part of the outside world had repercussions in the house on Whitely Heights. Rodolpho and Natacha were on the brink of a fierce nervous storm when Natacha, to prevent matters getting any worse, announced her intention of going away for a rest and to think things over. Rodolpho agreed to the plan: a temporary parting until he had finished work on *The Eagle*, after which they would meet to try to solve their differences, and in a calm, untroubled atmosphere find again the happiness they had known in Italy, France and Spain.

Rodolpho summoned his press agent and told him to announce to the newspapers that Mrs. Valentino was going on a visit to her mother in Nice. Mrs. Werner, who had been staying in Hollywood, would travel with her, and George Ullman would travel on the same train to New York where he had business. The date of her departure was given.

When the day arrived the Valentinos drove to the station in their biggest town car, a luxurious Isotta Fraschini. There they were met by an army of newspapermen and cameramen and

thousands of spectators. There were autograph books to sign and press questions to be answered. They posed, they kissed, they smiled, they embraced—for the Press. They were saying good-bye in public. Ever loyal, the 'unseen friends' of the Sheik surged forward as the couple stood on the steps of the train's observation car while the cameras clicked and the flash bulbs flicked. Next day, by the million, they would buy these newspapers and clip out the pictures of these poses, these kisses, these embraces.

George Ullman stood by quietly, trying to read from the faces of the two people he knew so well what their true feelings were. From Natacha's calm, inscrutable features he learned nothing. She might have been happy, she might have been sad. Her face showed no trace of her inner feelings. But beneath the smiles and hugs and jokes Rodolpho enacted for the benefit of the Press and the public, Ullman could see a man torn with grief.

Natacha, Ullman and Mrs. Werner, stood on the observation platform at the rear of the train, and the train began moving slowly out of the station. Rodolpho clung to the rail of the moving car and ran along with it until he could keep up no longer. Then he stood between the tracks, still waving as the train sped away, and he continued to stand there, bemused and deeply reflective, until the train with Natacha on it disappeared from view. He had ignored that old superstition that if a lover watches his true love out of sight he never sees her again.

Rodolpho returned to his work at the studios, to be the Great Lover again for the delight of millions. And while he was playing the dashing hero in front of the cameras, Natacha on the eastbound train was informing her aunt and George Ullman that she was not, after all, going to visit her mother in Nice. She intended to remain in New York, take an apartment there, and continue her career.

Ullman was astounded. Mrs. Werner tried to dissuade her. But nothing could divert Natacha from the course she had determined. She ignored the arguments they raised against her plan. If she went to Nice, they said, Rodolpho would join her just as soon as *The Eagle* was completed. But her mind was made up. She was no longer thinking of Rodolpho; he was busy with his career and she was going to be fully occupied with her own. All the pleading and persuasion in the world would not alter her resolve.

On learning that his wife had settled in New York, Rodolpho was at a loss to understand her change of plan. He wrote asking the reason. It was the first of a brisk exchange of letters, each one of which was more vitriolic and bitter and recriminating than its predecessor. This hurtful correspondence was finally ended by a wire from Natacha which finished things completely and irrevocably.

The great love that had given Rodolpho the happiest years of his life, the passionate romance that had changed him from a hard working youth into an artist of taste and discrimination, the marriage that had guided him upwards and upwards through a maze of difficulties to a starry pinnacle of power in an industry which had once refused him a rise in pay of fifty dollars a week—was over.

Natacha obtained the lead in a film called *When Love Grows Cold*, and then left New York for Paris to buy her wardrobe. While there—she sued for divorce.

PART II

A DREAM PUT AWAY

Chapter Fifteen

FOR Rodolpho there was no personal life left. There was only the life of Valentino the star: that gay whirl of amorous adventures which publicity writers had created to intrigue the public. So Rodolpho began to live that life. He began to live as millions had always believed Rudolph Valentino to live.

He was now seen out a great deal and always in the company of glamorous women. Vilma Banky, his leading lady in *The Eagle*, became a constant companion, and publicity made it a love affair.

It had the appearance of one. This beautiful Hungarian actress, who had been a typist in Budapest, was often a guest for lunch in Valentino's studio bungalow. When Falcon Lair was finally ready and the Great Lover moved in, Miss Banky frequently went there for dinner and remained most of the evening. In the eyes of the public this could be nothing less than a love affair. For the public had never known Rodolpho; they knew only the Sheik, and they couldn't imagine the Sheik being lonely or lovesick over the loss of one woman.

Rodolpho was now doing the publicity men's work for them. No longer had the publicists to rack their brains inventing stories; they merely noted Valentino's movements and reported them, with a little exaggeration here and a little insinuation there. First it was Vilma Banky the Sheik was in love with; then Pola Negri came along to add the excitement of indecision to the scene. Who next would the Sheik be after? Sometimes he would attend *premieres* with Pola Negri, sometimes with Vilma Banky, sometimes with a whole party of celebrated beauties. Valentino was becoming real, was beginning to glitter, was beginning to fit his reputation.

His new home set a high standard of luxury even for movie stars and pictures of it were published all over the world. His treasures were glowingly described. His collection of armour alone was worth more than one hundred thousand dollars. Then there were gorgeously bound books, some containing

priceless colour plates; china and porcelain *objets d'art* and Venetian and Bohemian glass; rare jade and ivories; antique furniture and wrought iron and valuable paintings, and all the hangings in the house were of richly coloured brocade, velvets and satins with embroideries in gold and silver. The home of the Sheik was as fabulous as the man.

He also owned six dogs, one of which had cost seven thousand dollars, a number of pure bred horses, and eight cars. The cars were not old ones like those he had once bought to tinker with; they were high-powered models from the best workshops in Europe. Everything he possessed was of the finest. Even his cigarettes were specially made in London and monogrammed 'R.V.' in gold. His wardrobe was of a quality that became the rank of King of Romance, and it was he who set the American male fashions. He was never seen other than immaculately dressed, and groomed to his finger tips.

Valentino lived like a king and the public loved to read about his life. Pictures by the thousand were distributed showing him climbing aboard his cabin-cruiser on which he sometimes sailed to Catalina island for week-ends; or lounging in a velvet smoking jacket amid the treasures of Falcon Lair; or standing beside his Voisin tourer which had a cobra emblem on the radiator cap; or sitting astride one of his pure-bred Arabian horses; or walking with his dogs; or examining his armour; or fencing or boxing or dancing, or wining and dining beautiful women at restaurants, night-clubs and parties.

The famous lunched with him in his luxuriously equipped studio bungalow—Constance Bennett, Ronald Colman, Vilma Banky, Marion Davies, Eugene Brewster, Constance Talmadge, Pola Negri, Louella Parsons—and in the process increased their own prestige.

The world gasped and gaped—this was the Valentino of their dreams.

Yet the lonely Rodolpho knew moments of anguish and longing that relentlessly increased the pain in his heart.

Returning from a typically gilded evening among Hollywood movie society he would sit alone in Falcon Lair and think of what might have been. He longed for the sound of that clear firm voice and for the touch of those slim white hands, for the strange vision

of beauty that had moved so gracefully about him making all else seem unimportant.

This lovely house had been for her; these beautiful fabrics and ivories had been her taste; these books and paintings and *objets d'art* she had selected. Without her they became dead dull things. He was surrounded in his private life by a dead dull world. Without her everything was dead and dull and empty. The beautiful quietude of life with her was lost completely. Now there was only the world of Valentino, the flashing, glittering, cacophonous world that she had thought sham, sham, and more sham. How right she had been. It *was* a gilded hell.

Rodolpho travelled to New York to be present at the first night of *The Eagle*. The film proved to be his greatest success to date and for the whole of its initial run at the Mark-Strand Theatre in New York there were long queues every day. The film had everything the public expected from the Screen's Greatest Lover—and it also set a new feminine fashion, manufacturers introducing details of the cossack costumes into the styles of the moment.

His stay in New York was brief though crowded and he entered into gaiety in an effort to keep loneliness at bay. Then he crossed to Europe again to be present at the London *première* of his new triumph.

Valentino's London was a gay and busy place with 'unseen friends' mobbing him in the streets and society wining and dining him more sedately.

Rodolpho's London was full of ghosts haunting him with visions of an earlier visit.

Yet his heart was beating rapidly, for there was a chance that he would see his beloved wife again. Natacha was in Paris and, according to the French legal code, he was obliged to establish a residence there before the divorce could be granted. Things might be different if they met again; perhaps she, too, was feeling the need. Even at this late hour a reconciliation might be possible. Paris, the city where they had been so joyously care-free, might reunite them for ever.

Rodolpho reached Paris in a mood of hopeful expectancy, only to learn that Natacha had left the city and was on the high seas bound for New York.

Crushed and desperately unhappy, he took a suite at the Plaza

Athenée and threw himself into reckless living. He was seen about in the night haunts with Jean Nash and the Dolly Sisters and other celebrated beauties living in Paris. Reports reached the American newspapers of the riotous and elaborate parties given for him and by him. Bills poured in to George Ullman which made the business manager gasp. Rodolpho was spending money at an unprecedented rate, not now on precious works of art but on excitement, illusion, fun, frolic, anything that would help to deaden the pain in his heart.

When he had been long enough in Paris to comply with the legal requirements enabling Natacha to obtain her divorce, he returned to London. He was joined there by Maria and Alberto and his brother's wife and child. The family were happy to be so reunited and spent a quietly enjoyable Christmas together.

This new meeting with his brother, whose happiness he envied as never before, reminded him of the dream that had once been his own, that dream of a farm and a wife and children, and he wondered whether it was still attainable. Natacha was lost to him for ever; the glorious wonder of that powerful love was gone. He was a lonely man, giving an illusory happiness to millions yet having nothing of contentment in his own life. And one day even the public would reject him, for at thirty he knew that he could not go on playing the role of Great Lover indefinitely. Talking this over with his manager they had agreed that he probably had another five years in which to rule, and then someone younger would come along to steal the vogue. After that he might play star character roles—Christopher Columbus, Cesare Borgia had been suggested—and then a new generation of film-goers with new needs and new tastes would not want him. What would be the prospect before him then? Long empty years without Natacha: unless, of course, he married again.

A new marriage seemed to be his only solution. This time it would not be a marriage of the Gallant Knight to the Great Lady of his boyhood dreams; nor would he take his bride to his palace of splendour. It would be a simple marriage of Rodolpho Guglielmi to a simple Italian girl who would be content to have Rodolpho as her husband and as her whole world. And they would live in a farm-house amid fruit trees and flowers in some sun-scorched district of California or even Italy.

He saw it so clearly now. Natacha had built the Valentino world and had kept Rodolpho happy in it, preventing him from slipping back to the simplicity of his youth. With Natacha gone the simple needs of his true self were reasserting themselves. His problems had arisen from the clash of two worlds—Valentino's against Rodolpho's—and he now had to find his way back to the world of Rodolpho Guglielmi, and be happy there.

With this new aim in life, with this new direction—the long road back to the values and aims of his beginnings—he spent a moderately happy period in London with his family. He also persuaded Alberto and his family to travel back with him to America to stay at Falcon Lair. The magnificent home held little for him alone, but now it would know the laughter of a child, voluble Italian conversation and the cheerful singing of a happy mother.

The great Valentino began work on *The Son of the Sheik* and went out as before to behave in public as his followers demanded, but was able to know, in the few private moments that were Rodolpho's, a family life that had some of the warmth of the one he remembered in a white-walled cottage long ago.

Chapter Sixteen

THE new film was begun in February 1926 and was to be a sequel to *The Sheik*.

Once again he was to play the role of a primitive desert lover, riding an Arabian steed across a sandy waste, snatching the woman he desired and taking her against her will to his desert stronghold to bind her trembling body in his strong arms, press his passion to her lips and treat her protestations with scorn—all this for the ecstatic enjoyment of those millions of women who adored such demonstrations of masculine vigour.

The Son of the Sheik, scripted from Mrs. E. M. Hull's sequel to *The Sheik*, was to be a box-office suit packed with trumps, for United Artists were skilled showmen determined not to miss a single trick of appeal.

When working in front of the cameras Rodolpho was at his happiest. His own dreams had been proved illusion and he had suffered the anguish and heartbreak of a terrible awakening; but in keeping alive the dreams of others he believed that he was earning his passage back to reality, to happiness, to Rodolpho Guglielmi.

And when he was not creating in *The Son of the Sheik* another aphrodisiac for the masses, he continued to play the part of the fabulous Valentino in person. At the end of a long day under the glare of the arc-lamps he discarded his burnoose and make-up, donned immaculate evening attire and went into the glare of publicized gaiety with Pola Negri, whose consort he now most frequently was. He was seen at costume balls and dinner parties and first nights with her. They rode and went sailing together. The Press rumoured another romance and foretold another marriage.

He was constantly being asked about marriage plans by interviewers and reporters. He always replied that he would never again marry "an American woman", but as half the beauties of the film colony were of non-American descent the

Press was free to continue forecasting. Meanwhile, Valentino himself had achieved American citizenship.

With the release of *The Son of the Sheik* to the cinemas there were once again scenes of hysterical acclaim. The first performance of the film at Grauman's Million Dollar Theatre in Los Angeles was made a brilliant occasion. The *foyer* of the cinema was thronged with celebrities posing before Press cameras in their finest tinsel of success against a background composed of a flower piece eight feet high and ten feet wide with 'Rudolph Valentino' spelled out in white carnations over a bank of red gladioli. This extravagant tribute came from Pola Negri.

Valentino arrived with Pola Negri on his arm and accompanied by twelve guests, among them Charlie Chaplin, Louella Parsons, Mae Murray and her husband, Prince Dirvani. The 'unseen friends' yelled and shrieked and called out compliments and nearly trampled underfoot the body of police marshalled to prevent them stripping their idol of his clothes to cherish as souvenirs.

Inside the theatre the entrance of the man-of-the-hour was followed by a brief silence, then whispers as details of the glamorous party were noted, and then tremendous applause. The lights were lowered and yet another audience settled down to witness the Latin love technique as practised by the Prince of Sex Appeal. When the lights went up again the audience rose and cheered the film and the man.

A tour of personal appearances had been planned for the key American cities where the film was to be shown. Accompanied by George Ullman, Rodolpho went first to San Francisco, where, in the course of a civic welcome, the mayor presented him with a black spaniel puppy. Rodolpho sent it to his kennels at Falcon Lair.

The heat was gruelling in that summer of 1926 and the journeys between the cities lasting days at a stretch sapped his energy and strained his nerves still further. In private compartments of the trans-continental trains he would try to relax, dressed in a Chinese lounging suit, with books, magazines, delicacies, drinks and cigarettes about him. He slept fitfully or sat gazing out at the lonely landscapes. The vastness of the American scene never failed to affect him. Everything was so vast in this country.

The countryside was big, the fortunes were big, the hearts were big, and if a man was favoured by the whim of so big a public he became almost a god.

In Chicago they moved into the Blackstone Hotel to rest before going on to New York. It was in this city that Rodolpho picked up a copy of a newspaper, the *Chicago Tribune*, which had earlier published articles revealing an unfriendly attitude towards him, and read something that destroyed what little peace of mind remained to him. It was an article headed 'Pink Powder Puffs'.

Many articles attacking him had appeared before this time, for any writer hoping to be noticed had only to attach some sensation or slur to the Valentino name to ensure for himself a ready-made public. Anything concerning Valentino was news and anything that could be connected, even remotely, with him became news as a consequence. Therefore, his name was frequently drawn into happenings that in actuality bore little relation to him. 'Pink Powder Puffs' was just such an article, a bit of journalistic whimsy on a subject which would not have claimed much attention on its own account, but with Valentino woven into it made a column of sensational matter.

"A new public ballroom was opened on the north side a few days ago, a truly handsome place and apparently well run," the *Tribune's* writer began. "The pleasant impression lasts until one steps into the men's washroom and finds there on the wall a contraption of glass tubes and levers and a slot for the insertion of a coin. The glass tubes contain a fluffy pink solid and beneath them one reads an amazing legend which runs something like this: 'Insert coin. Hold personal puff beneath the tube. Then pull the lever'.

"A powder-vending machine! In a men's washroom! Homo Americanus! Why didn't someone quietly drown Rodolpho Guglielmi, alias Valentino, years ago?

"And was the pink powder machine pulled from the wall or ignored? It was not. It was used. We personally saw two 'men' step up, insert coin, hold 'kerchief beneath the spout, pull the lever, then take the pretty pink stuff and put it on their cheeks in front of the mirror.

"Another member of this department, one of the most benevo-

lent men on earth, burst raging into the office the other day because he had seen a young 'man' combing his pomaded hair on the elevator. But we claim our pink powder story beats all this hollow.

"It is time for a matriarchy if the male of the species allows such things to persist. Better a rule by masculine women than by effeminate men.

"Who or what is to blame is what puzzles us. Is this degeneration into effeminacy a cognate reaction with pacifism to the virilities and realities of the war? Are pink powder and parlour pinks in any way related? How does one reconcile masculine cosmetics, sheiks, floppy pants, and slave bracelets, with a disregard for law and aptitude for crime more in keeping with the frontier of half a century ago than a twentieth-century metropolis?

"Do women like the type of 'man' who pats pink powder on his face in a public washroom and arranges his coiffure in a public elevator? Do women at heart belong to the Wilsonian era of 'I Didn't Raise My Boy To Be a Soldier'? What has become of the old caveman line?

"It is a strange social phenomenon and one that is running its course not only here in America but in Europe as well. Chicago may have its powder puffs; London has its dancing men and Paris its gigolos . . . Hollywood is the national school of masculinity. Rudy, the beautiful gardener's boy, is the prototype of the American male.

"Hells bells. Oh, sugar."

As Rodolpho read the article his face went ashen. The article was a calculated insult. How could he be even remotely connected with a powder machine in the men's washroom of a ballroom? In a white heat of rage he discussed with Ullman what form of retaliation was possible, and eventually a reply in the form of a Press release was decided upon. A representative of the *Chicago Herald-Examiner*, the rival of the *Tribune*, was summoned and presented with the reply which they published next day:

"To the man (?) who wrote the editorial headed 'Pink Powder Puffs' in the *Chicago Tribune*.

"The above-mentioned editorial is at least the second scurrilous

personal attack you have made upon me, my race, and my father's name.

"You slur my Italian ancestry; you cast ridicule upon my Italian name; you cast doubt upon my manhood.

"I call you in return a contemptible coward, and to prove which of us is the better man I challenge you to a personal contest. This is not a challenge to a duel in the generally accepted sense—that would be illegal. But, in Illinois, boxing is legal; so is wrestling. I, therefore, defy you to meet me in the boxing or wrestling arena to prove, in typically American fashion (for I am an American citizen), which of us is more a man.

"I prefer this test of honour to be private, so I may give you the beating you deserve, and because I want to make it absolutely plain that this challenge is not for purposes of publicity. I am handing copies of this to the newspapers simply because I doubt that anyone so cowardly as to write about me as you have done would respond to a challenge unless forced by the Press to do so.

"I do not know who you are or how big you are, but this challenge stands if you are as big as Jack Dempsey.

"I will meet you immediately or give you a reasonable time in which to prepare, for I assume that your muscles must be flabby and weak, judging by your cowardly mentality, and that you will have to replace the vitriol in your veins with red blood—if there be a place in such a body as yours for red blood and manly muscle.

"I welcome criticism of my work as an actor—but I will resent with every muscle of my body attacks upon my manhood and ancestry.

"Hoping that I will have an opportunity to demonstrate to you that the wrist under a slave bracelet may snap a real fist into your sagging jaw, and that I may teach you respect of a man even though he happens to prefer to keep his face clean, I remain with utter contempt, Rudolph Valentino.

"P.S. I will return to Chicago within ten days. You may send your answer to me in New York, care of the United Artists Corporation."

This challenge appeared in the *Chicago Herald-Examiner* and was copied and cabled all over the world.

Rodolpho had been genuinely hurt by the attack. It seemed

to him to step outside the ethical boundaries of criticism. More than ever he needed the clear cool voice which would have placed the matter in true perspective, the voice which would have said: criticism is a petty thing and soon dies out. But there was no one there to say it, and he was tired and unhappy. Listless and miserable as never before, he continued the journey to New York.

On arrival there it was clear that one newspaper could not destroy a popularity that was sustained daily by hundreds of other newspapers. He was met at the station by thousands of his fans. This car was escorted by a squad of motor-cycle police to the Ambassador Hotel where an army of reporters and cameramen awaited him. He posed for countless photographs and replied to questions about his physical strength, which was the Press's latest interest.

The boxing correspondent of the *New York Evening Journal* told Ullman that he personally doubted Valentino's reputed ability as an athlete and boxer and for his own satisfaction would like the star to demonstrate his boxing talent in a friendly bout. Ullman agreed to arrange this and an exhibition bout between Rodolpho and Jack Dempsey subsequently took place on the roof of the Ambassador Hotel to the whirl of motion picture cameras and the flashing of Press cameras. Rodolpho's capabilities as a boxer impressed the newsmen.

The day following the exhibition bout, Rodolpho had the painful duty of saying good-bye to Alberto and his family. They had decided to return to Italy and had travelled from Hollywood to embark. Their departure grieved him more than he dared show; he had grown used to their being at Falcon Lair. Now no vestige of a simple life remained, and to Rodolpho it seemed that defeat was complete.

Chapter Seventeen

THE SON OF THE SHEIK opened in New York at the Mark-Strand Theatre. The first performance began at 11 a.m. but there were long queues many hours before. Despite the terrific heat, which rose to ninety-eight degrees as the day wore on, people continued to join the queues until two double lines stood along the length of two blocks in each direction from the theatre entrance.

It had been announced that Valentino was to make a personal appearance at the theatre in the afternoon. From two o'clock all street traffic outside the main entrance was brought to a standstill as thousands of admirers, fanning themselves with newspapers and wiping their faces with wet handkerchiefs in efforts to keep cool, took up their positions.

The crowd surged forward as Rodolpho arrived with George Ullman and three friends, and police, linked arm in arm, managed to keep a path clear. In the *foyer* banked with flowers, Press cameramen worked incessantly, and then Valentino's party entered the theatre, which was packed to capacity.

After the film had been shown he made his usual short speech, left the stage and made his way to the stage door. The 'unseen friends' were not to be denied. Outside the stage door four thousand people were milling and pushing and crowding every foot of space for a considerable distance to every side. In the middle of this mob was Rodolpho's car.

With Ullman and his friends surrounding him, he headed for the car, moving as quickly as Ullman's broad shoulders could open a path in the crowd. His head jerked painfully to one side as someone wrenched off his necktie; his hat went; a hand snatched the handkerchief from his top pocket; he was pulled this way and that as fingers clenched the buttons of his clothes and pulled them off, tearing the garments so as to ruin them completely. As he struggled and fought his way forward his wrists were grabbed, the cuff-links were torn from his shirt and his slave-bracelet dug into his

flesh as it was tugged along his wrist to the bulge of his hand. Dazed and utterly dishevelled, he finally reached the comparative safety of the car, though one woman more frenzied than the rest jumped on to the running-board as the car began to move, was dragged off by the crowd and hit the road with a thud. Rodolpho wanted to stop the car to avoid further injury to the crowd, but his friends said the crowd would overwhelm and strip him, so the car edged forward and eventually got clear.

That evening he went with a party of friends, which included Jean Acker, to Texas Guinan's restaurant in New York. During the cabaret, Rodolpho allowed Ramin Bey, a fakir renowned as an exponent of mystic magic, to thrust a long needle through his forearm. The Indian had at first proposed that he should pass it through the star's cheek, but Ullman had risen to object to such treatment of the million-dollar profile. Under the influence of the fakir, Rodolpho felt no pain at the needle's thrust and no blood was drawn, but he was wildly applauded for his courage.

In New York he saw a lot of Jean Acker. His first wife, he felt, understood him as once he had understood her. He saw many old friends from whom he had drifted during the years with Natacha. They were all part of the night life of New York, and, now that he had rejoined it so thoroughly, he constantly met them and joined their parties.

A week later he left for Chicago to make a personal appearance at the Roosevelt Theatre.

Reporters, feature writers and sports writers in the city wanted to know if there was really to be a fight between him and the unknown writer who had insulted him, but he told them that he had not received a reply to his challenge. To appease their curiosity concerning his sports prowess another boxing exhibition was arranged, this time with professional pugilists in a Chicago gymnasium. He also issued a further statement to the press:

"It is evident that you cannot make a coward fight any more than you can draw blood from a turnip.

"The heroic silence of the writer who chose to attack me without any provocation in the *Chicago Tribune* leaves no doubt as to the total absence of manliness in his whole make-up.

"I feel I have been vindicated, because I consider his silence as a tacit retraction and an admission, which I am forced to accept even though it is not entirely to my liking."

This statement was published by every newspaper in Chicago—except the *Tribune*—and received immense publicity in many countries.

When Rodolpho appeared on the Roosevelt Theatre stage to make his speech after the showing of *The Son of the Sheik*, it was clear that the *Tribune's* attack had in no way affected his popularity in the city. The applause greeting his appearance lasted several minutes and was repeated the moment he ended the speech. Later that day he set off for New York.

Following a week in New York he travelled by road to appear at the opening of his film at the Virginia Theatre, Atlantic City. His time of arrival and route had been made known to the city authorities through advance publicity, with the result that he was met on the outskirts by the mayor and an escort of ten policemen on motor cycles. Hundreds of his fans were there in cars which fell in behind his own to form a triumphal procession into the town. In the city centre his car had to travel at a snail's pace and people kept jumping on to the running board to thrust a hand inside the saloon to touch their idol. The crowds surrounding his hotel were the largest and most insistent he had ever seen and were only to be appeased by regular appearances by him at the window of his suite.

The Virginia Theatre was the scene of further mass acclaim and he was mobbed again on leaving it. Later that evening he accepted an invitation to attend a revue at the city's Ritz-Carlton Hotel and was there persuaded to dance the tango he had made famous in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*.

Next day he returned to New York, which was in the grip of a record August heat-wave, to make a personal appearance at the Strand Theatre, Brooklyn. Again the crowds ignored the stifling summer temperatures to create scenes of extraordinary mass-worship and Valentino returned to his hotel sweat-smearred, dishevelled and utterly exhausted. Ullman had arranged for him to take a two weeks' rest before continuing the tour with a personal appearance in Philadelphia.

But there could be no rest now for Rodolpho. In quiet hours his memory mocked him with pictures of past happiness and his mind compared his weary grind of public appearances with the private luxury and restful ease of life as once it had been. Sometimes he conjured anew that dream of a Californian vineyard, of marriage to an Italian girl, of a home and children of his own, but the madcap world that claimed him drained him of all energy to secure it.

Two weeks free of public engagements meant no rest to him, chained as he was to the Valentino legend, the rage to live, to laugh and forget. He could not relax in his hotel suite. He could not keep his mind on a book. His thoughts revolved around one face, one voice, one smile, one love. Without it his life was empty, empty of everything but sadness and memories. Better the gay life, the Valentino life, which left no moments free for reflection; better that than these sad encounters with the past. No one would share his sorrow, but if he laughed there were many who would laugh with him. So he must keep up the pretence and step up the pace. No matter how tired his body, nor how dulled his mind—he must step up the pace, keep up the whirl of the Valentino life, the fun, the frolic, and the sham, sham, sham.

So Rodolpho stepped up the pace. Each night brought new variations on the theme of how to forget. Each evening brought its gift of gaiety as shallow as the age, the fabulous nineteen-twenties. New York was a rip-roaring bubble of froth and illusion in a champagne decade booming with prosperity. Later there would be a halt, and then a crash, but the time was not yet.

There were cabarets and parties, first-nights and farewells, night-clubs and slick joints, and gay escapades of doing the town, seeing the bright lights, and living on top of the world. So many were trying to forget so much. No one imagined for a moment that Rudy, dear Rudy, the darling of them all, was also seeking a soporific for his wounds, that it was a question of maintaining the pace. . . .

And it was after such an evening of whip-cream frolic, shared on this occasion by a beautiful showgirl named Marion Benda, that Rodolpho returned to his hotel suite feeling unwell, complaining of pains, and his face unhealthily pale.

Ullman, who was there, felt anxious, but Rodolpho laughed

and said he would be all right in the morning. He went to bed.

Still worried, Ullman went into Rodolpho's bedroom just before dawn and found him groaning in pain. Without delay he called an ambulance.

At the Polyclinic Hospital there was a hurried examination and a condition of acute appendicitis was established. An operation was performed immediately.

The newspapers were sceptical of the announcement that Valentino had been taken ill. They thought this to be a publicity stunt. The announcement was given a few lines on the front pages. The following day, however, it was clear to the Press that the matter was genuine, for a bulletin concerning the star was issued from the Polyclinic Hospital.

Only the briefest details were given:

"Early in the morning of 17th August, Rudolph Valentino was taken suddenly ill in New York. He was removed immediately to the Polyclinic Hospital where he was operated on the same evening for appendicitis."

The news struck at the hearts of millions, but the bulletin did not say enough. In response to expressions of anxiety from all parts of America the hospital began issuing bulletins hourly, giving the slightest change in his condition, and special editions of the newspapers were rushed to the stands where crowds awaited them.

The news was good. The operation had been a success and Valentino was comfortable. There was a general sigh of relief and a rush to wish him well. The New York communications system was deluged by cables, telegrams, letters and postcards from every country where Valentino films had been shown. People telephoned from all over the American continent, jamming the city's lines. So many called in person at the hospital that harassed officials had to set up a public information desk to answer the queries and receive the good wishes of callers. Flowers arrived by the truck load and were distributed at Rodolpho's request throughout the wards. The Polyclinic Hospital, usually an institution as sober and formal as its name, became the discharge point of a nation's joy and the well-wishing of persons all over the world.

The spirit infected the staff and nurses, who, as much as the occasional crowds which collected in the streets outside, were happy that Rudy was going to get well.

Rodolpho was cheerful. He wanted to know whether during the first day of pain, he had acted like a man or a pink powder puff; the *Tribune's* article had bitten deep.

He instructed that his friends and relatives were to be notified that he was merely indisposed, and it was to be stressed that his illness was not serious. No one must be given further cause for concern, especially as the operation was over and he felt much better. He said he did not feel any pain now.

At this the doctors were concerned. Their patient should be feeling a certain amount of pain. That was normal in the aftermath of an operation of this kind. There were hurried consultations and a reviewing of the illness—and the world learned of a sudden change for the worse.

Peritonitis had set in.

Now each new edition of the newspapers brought increased anxiety.

Four doctors were in attendance night and day. A specialist had been called. New treatments would be tried. A second specialist was being summoned. As the long sweltering summer days succeeded each other, anxiety gave way to a much less bearable tension.

The newspapers conjectured, the crowds outside the hospital waited in silence, but there was little of substance to go on.

Then alarm: some of Valentino's closest friends had been seen leaving the hospital in a distressed condition . . . George Ullman, too distraught to talk to waiting newspapermen, had sped away in a taxi . . . Jean Acker had been to see him, had sat at his bedside, and he had not known her. Rudy just lay there, she said, oblivious of everything, his hand clasped over the platinum slave bracelet on his right wrist.

On that stifling Sunday, 22nd August, thousands flocked to the churches to pray for Valentino's life. In some churches special prayers were said in open congregation.

By this time the crowds outside the hospital were so considerable as to completely disrupt traffic in the district. On every pretext, women tried to enter the hospital, and some managed to

pass the numerous guards around the entrances and to infiltrate to the corridors, where detectives stood outside the room in which Valentino lay.

Throughout that Sunday special editions of newspapers sold rapidly in great cities like Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Francisco. In small towns like Tishomingo in Oklahoma and Pocatello in Idaho everything was brought to a standstill by crowds in the main streets waiting for the latest news. Few who stood in the streets, outside newspaper offices, or beside the cable offices in cities, towns and out of the way habitations could have explained their sense of anxiety, least of all why they wept when they heard that he was sinking fast, that he no longer knew anyone, that blood transfusions were being tried, that a priest had been called. But they waited just the same. And the dawn of Monday brought the news that at twelve minutes past midnight he had died.



RUDOLPH VALENTINO and NATACHA RAMBOVA



Jack Dempsey is refereeing this bout between
Valentino and boxer Gene Delmont

Chapter Eighteen

IT was the people's grief which made that August memorable, not the respectful dimming of Broadway's gleaming signs, the sombre newspaper editorials, the statements of homage from the famous of many lands, but the people's grief.

In America, Britain, France and Italy sadness was unconfined to class or creed. From all over the world came evidence of popular grief for one whose image had been loved. This sadness was as unbounded as it was unprecedented.

In New York, crowds greater than the police could control surged and struggled along the route of a hearse bearing Valentino's body from the Polyclinic Hospital to an undertaker's chapel, but that was merely the beginning.

The body was placed upon a flower-banked bier beside an altar in the undertaker's chapel, the head resting on a scarlet cushion. A candle flickered at each corner of the bier as the body 'lay in state' amid the floral tributes of the humblest and the greatest. Mussolini had sent a wreath and Pola Negri a blanket of red roses.

Upon the chapel converged a host of women determined to take a final glimpse of the Great Lover, and one thousand policemen were called out to enforce orderliness. They were helpless against the hysterical mass. Men and women were trampled underfoot as they fought a way to the entrance of the chapel. The windows of shops were smashed as the crowds swept this way and that. Ambulances arrived and first-aid stations were set up on the spot to deal with the injured. For hours the grief-crazed, spectacle-hungry multitude harried itself in a turmoil of frenzy. Then bewildered, bruised, humiliated, they at last allowed the police to gain control. An orderly system was inaugurated whereby the 'unseen friends' were to be allowed to enter the chapel in a moving line and pass Valentino's bier in single file.

They filed past it at the rate of one hundred and fifty a minute for three days.

Nine thousand people every hour glimpsed the candle-lit, flower-laden body, saw the famous profile silhouetted in deathly ease. Ninety thousand passed by in a day, and there were more to come.

No genius of showmanship had devised this show, but it was no less than the greatest on earth. It was uncanny, unreal, unrepeatable—and it was a grim paradox. The celluloid enchanter, the shadow lover of a thousand bewitched moments, the handsome intriguer of a hundred dreams, was to be seen at last in the flesh. He who had been of flame, of fire, of passion in that flickering world of longings and desires was here seen in substance—lifeless. And the line kept moving.

Some wept, some prayed, some were nervous, all were solemn. There were incidents: a woman screamed, many fainted, some were taken ill and led away. But the line kept moving.

One hundred and fifty thousand viewed the bier in two days, and there were more to come. Still the line kept moving. The line kept moving until the flesh on the cheeks of the one who lay still was as wan as the candles' wax, until it seemed that more than life had been drained from them.

From Hollywood came news that Valentino's friends and associates were in deep distress, some weeping openly. Pola Negri was reported to be in a state of collapse with two doctors constantly in attendance.

Statements paying homage to the dead star were many and varied, and the newspapers published each successive tribute.

"The death of Rudolph Valentino," said Charlie Chaplin, "is one of the greatest tragedies that has occurred in the history of the motion picture industry."

"A great tragedy," said Sam Goldwyn. "It will be felt wherever he is known."

Gloria Swanson: "A real artist, a charming gentleman, a true sportsman and a good friend."

Alice Terry, Vilma Banky, Mae Murray, Agnes Ayres, Ramon Navarro, Buster Keaton, Cecil de Mille, John Gilbert, Noah Beery—the whole glittering parade of movie celebrity paid homage.

The ordinary folk, meanwhile, lined the streets, collected in crowds, or attended church.

A funeral service was held at the Church of St. Malacy in New

York and a crowd estimated at one hundred thousand gathered in the streets outside. Despite special precautions on the part of the city authorities, the police were again unable to control the crowds, and there were casualties. First-aid stations were again set up to minister to those who fainted or received injury in the crush.

The public continued to demonstrate when the body was taken from the undertaker's chapel to be transported to Hollywood. Along streets lined by hundreds of thousands a car slowly carried the bronze casket to the station, followed by a procession of vehicles piled high with flowers. The casket was placed in a special coach and buried beneath flowers, and the train began the three thousand mile journey to Hollywood.

New York was in no sense the boundary of this irrepressible grief, for wherever the train stopped on its long journey west more 'unseen friends' gathered, heads bared, cheeks sometimes wet with tears, and some among them knelt to pray.

In the towns and hamlets of many other countries this grief had innumerable counterparts. No one had expected so young a man to die, and Valentino had meant so much to an international following. In the first shock of losing a loved one, the heart and the senses combine. Human sorrow found its more sensational expressions in New York, in London, in Paris and in Berlin but in lesser places sorrow was as heartfelt, though evidence of it was not so spectacular. Untouched by the world outside, grief grew intensely personal, expressible only in poetry.

Poems, diverse in style and address, were written to reveal again just how much this film romantic had meant to the individual. One working girl's 'In Memoriam' contained the lines:

There ain't much fun for most of us,
Nor much that's beautiful. And so,
When someone brings you shining dreams,
You hate to let him go.

So numerous were the poetic tributes to the Great Lover that a volume of this specialized verse could easily be assembled. No less a poet than the late Humbert Wolfe contributed to the *London Observer* a poem in remembrance.

Of the welter of eulogy which flooded the popular newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic these extracts are apt:

"Romance is the only thing worth big headlines," stated the *New York World*, "and Rudolph Valentino spelt romance."

"He was a great artist," wrote the *Daily Express*, "who mastered more than any of his contemporaries the genius that lies in simplicity and restraint."

The *Chicago Tribune*, the newspaper which had fired frequent broadsides at his national esteem, wrote after his death: "The death of Rudolph Valentino is a deep personal loss to most of us. We loved him because he was a weaver of dreams. Because he brought colour, romance, thrill into our lives. He embroidered drab moments, he smiled into our eyes and for a little while we too became story-book people and everyday worries were things that were very far away."

Thus even the newspaper which had published the 'Powder Puff' epistle acknowledged a people's loss.

Those who had found their dreams a refuge from a callous reality, those who had longed in a changing world for a breath of the gentleness of a more settled era, those in whose breasts a love of chivalry still rested, and above all the lonely—these it was who mourned him. From them came the host of sweethearts who wept over his grave, and over the years they have kept his legend bright.

In distant hamlets, stony-walled, where ends
Civilization in a sea bird's cry,
You made rough lovers, horny-handed friends,
And ruddy cheeks are wet because you die.

How many a reaper with a muffled pain
Lashes her harvest where a red sun sets,
Into that heart you brought a dream of Spain,
A scent of flowers, a sound of castanets.

And shapeless women working for mean pay
Remember, jogging on the laden carts,
O perfect lover, how you cast away
Money and roses and those bleeding hearts.

Safe in the cottage shrine tonight you stand,
Some sun-baked yokel weeding on his knees
Thinks of a duel for a lady's hand,
And hears a tango under orange trees.

Rest people's hero. Time can never take
Your gallant image from the common breast;
A chorus girl cries out her heart must break—
And it may be you fed her need. So rest.¹

Rodolpho returned to Hollywood for the last time, to the city in which he had known despair, frustration, penury, wealth, hope and heartbreak, the city which had made him one of the most beloved men of history as well as one of its loneliest.

Hollywood, usually so vivacious and gay, was in a mood of deep sorrow. All its glittering stars paid homage at the memorial service. Then, while aeroplanes dropped wreaths from the sky, Rudolph Valentino was laid to rest—a dream put away from the world.

¹An anonymous poem discovered in a private collection of Valentino mementos.

THE END



*The Bishop of Broadway**David Belasco, His Life and Work*

By CRAIG TIMBERLAKE

THE GREATEST GENIUS of the American theater and perhaps the most eccentric member of a traditionally eccentric profession died some thirty-odd years ago. His name was David Belasco. Why is Belasco's name still spoken in whispers by the people who worked with him on and off the stage? Why have more and more myths and less and less facts been revolving about this fabulous figure in American art? The authentic answers to the unique riddles concerning David Belasco's life and work are set down for the first time in Craig Timberlake's new volume *The Bishop of Broadway*. Here is the complete and authoritative portrait of David Belasco that has been so difficult to come by and so long in coming. Crowded with over 70 rare, exciting, and nostalgic photographs of his life and times, this book will be a revelation to a generation that has grown up limited to the once-removed pleasures of motion pictures, radio, and television, and that has learned only through hearsay the name of one of the American theater's greatest producer-director-writers. To the members of a slightly older generation this volume will conjure up glorious memories of a past that included those incomparable days of the Gay 'Nineties and the Roaring 'Twenties, and those incomparable artists, David Warfield, Frances Starr, Lenore Ulric, Mrs. Leslie Carter, Edwin Booth, Cecil B. DeMille, and a host of others. The author unfolds the story of Broadway's greatest showman with the humor and scholarship that will gratify not only the theater scholar and enthusiast, but all who enjoy America's lusty and exciting yesterdays and the life story of a fascinating and enigmatic pioneer on the American scene.

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